



Member Update

A Message from NATCA President Nick Daniels: Another Step Forward

NATCA Members,

I want to spend a few moments of your time discussing the agreement we made with the FAA to recruit and retain air traffic controllers. I'm proud of this agreement, which addresses one of the numerous issues facing the air traffic control system.

First, it is important to note the significance of this agreement and put it into perspective. Over the past three months, many things have happened to other groups of federal employees, but NATCA's members have been spared due to our disciplined messaging, engagement in the media, and our efforts to build relationships and coalitions. We continue to seek additional opportunities for us to reach agreements that benefit all of our members. However, we cannot miss these opportunities for real progress. Perhaps most importantly, we must be patient - all of our goals cannot be achieved immediately.

In January, the Administration instituted a federal hiring freeze; air traffic control is exempted from the hiring freeze. At the same time, probationary employees throughout the government were removed from service. Air traffic controllers were exempt from this as well.

As for the federal budget, nearly every government department and agency face a significant budget cut. Only the Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Department of Transportation (DOT) are expected to see increases. For the DOT, the additional funds are specifically to increase recruitment, training, and retention of air traffic controllers. This is not an accident. Staffing has been NATCA's top priority for more than a decade. We have put in the work, and now the Administration, Congress, and the entire aviation industry agree with us, and we are all united in this shared goal. Their support is a testament to the importance of our work and the value they place on our profession.

In addition to the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024, which calls for the maximum hiring of air traffic controllers for the duration of the law (five years), the Administration and Secretary of Transportation Sean Duffy have made

efforts to supercharge air traffic controller hiring.

Congress is also moving forward on NATCA's goals. The U.S. House of Representatives Transportation and Infrastructure Committee (T&I) has proposed meaningful new funding for the FAA, all of which is allocated to NATCA-identified priorities. The air traffic control provisions of the T&I reconciliation package include an additional \$12.5 billion to be expended before September 30, 2029, which directly affects our current and future members.

In the proposed reconciliation package:

1. \$1 billion allocated for recruitment, retention, and training of air traffic controllers.
2. \$2 billion for tower and TRACON replacement, including \$240 million for Federal Contract Towers.
3. \$500 million for runway safety programs and airport surface surveillance projects
4. \$3 billion for radar systems replacement
5. \$4.75 billion for telecommunications infrastructure,
6. \$260 million for weather observation technology in Alaska.

This commitment provides a major downpayment for improving our staffing, facilities, and equipment, and we are happy to support these air traffic control provisions.

As an example of where we stand, Secretary Duffy introduced NATCA to the press and thanked us for our partnership. At a DOT town hall yesterday, Secretary Duffy stated, "I'm proud of the deal we made with the air traffic controllers union. They are a great partner to work with."

Considering what is happening to other unions, many of you are concerned about NATCA's place under the current Administration. In NATCA's Constitution, Article 1, Section 2, it lays out NATCA's objectives. First among them is "to preserve, promote and improve the working conditions of air traffic controllers and other aviation-safety related employees." We are committed to doing just that and we are carrying it out.

NATCA has chosen to find a path forward to work with the Administration on behalf of all of you and the National Airspace System. As in all relationships, the first step is finding common ground and building trust; this agreement is a major first step in that direction.

This agreement is not perfect, nor does it represent the end of our commitment referenced above. The entire aviation community, Congress, and the Administration are focused on recruiting, training, and retaining controllers, and we delivered that first and foremost to our members.

As I said, it is the first step. It is not the last. Our commitment to you and our shared goals remains unwavering.

If I had an unlimited amount of money and had the final decision on how to spend it, I would certainly address all your pay concerns. However, neither of those things are true. The federal government is shrinking in terms of

personnel and funding, and where it is growing, it is growing for a specific purpose. We must find our opportunities and move forward when and where we can.

One of those opportunities is improving the safety of the NAS and modernizing the equipment. These challenges compel us to continue partnering with the FAA and DOT. Our professionalism and credibility on safety will only enhance our relationship, and that expanded relationship will help us find ways to address the concerns that matter most to all of you.

For those of you who will financially benefit from this agreement and those who recognize that having more certified controllers benefits all of us in reducing six-day weeks and providing increased leave opportunities, please don't let yourself get caught up in the negative voices. What remains crucial is that NATCA continues to improve our relationships and keeps moving forward, improving the working conditions of air traffic controller and other aviation safety-related employees one step at a time.

In Solidarity,
Nick Daniels
NATCA President

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