

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 31, 2014

The Honorable Michael Huerta
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20591

Dear Administrator Huerta:

We are writing to inquire about the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) long-term strategy and plan for the Federal Contract Tower Program.

The Federal Contract Tower Program, in place for over 30 years, has exemplified how the private sector and Federal government can form and implement a working partnership aimed at improving air traffic safety. Currently, 252 airports and their surrounding communities around the nation benefit from the enhanced safety and improved air traffic control services provided by contract towers.

Federal contract towers supplement FAA-staffed facilities around the country, buttressing a unified national air traffic control system and playing a vital role in connecting smaller airports and rural communities with the national air transportation system.

The contract tower program is one of the FAA's most cost-effective programs. Contract towers handle approximately 28 percent of the nation's air traffic control tower operations but account for only 14 percent of the FAA's total tower operations budget. Congress has clearly demonstrated numerous times—in bipartisan and bicameral fashions—the merit and need for the federal contract tower program.

Recently, FAA has initiated a planning effort aimed at right-sizing the national airspace system under the direction of Deputy Administrator Michael Whitaker as well as the formation of a low activity tower working group. It is not clear if, or how, these two efforts are related. The initiative to right-size the national airspace system has been mentioned in testimony before Congress, in numerous speeches by FAA executives, and FAA documents. Despite these public references to this initiative, few details are known other than vague statements by FAA officials indicating an intention to match FAA's services and facilities with the demand from aviation stakeholders.

We believe it is critically important that FAA work collaboratively and in partnership with the key aviation stakeholders before making important policy decisions that impact the long term sustainability of contract towers nationwide. As such, we request a detailed explanation to the following questions by August 29, 2014:

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- The Federal Contract Tower Program has been supporting the national air traffic control system and enhancing air traffic safety for over thirty years. How does the FAA plan to support the continued operation of this program in its long term strategic planning?
- In February 2014, you announced four strategic initiatives that included an effort to match the services the FAA provides and the facilities the FAA maintains with the demand from stakeholders, calling it right-sizing the national airspace system. How does the FAA currently believe the Federal Contract Tower Program fits within efforts to right-size the national airspace system?
- The FAA recently created the Low Activity Tower Working Group within the Air Traffic Organization. How does the Federal Aviation Administration currently believe the Federal Contract Tower Program fits within the current mission of the working group?
- As the Federal Aviation Administration develops its long-term strategic plan for the Federal Contract Tower Program, how are you going to continue and maintain engagement with Congress and the variety of stakeholder groups, including users of the national airspace system, to ensure all perspectives are considered?

Thank you for your time and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



James M. Inhofe
United States Senator



Joe Manchin III
United States Senator



Kelly Ayotte
United States Senator



Mark Begich
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Roy Blunt
United States Senator



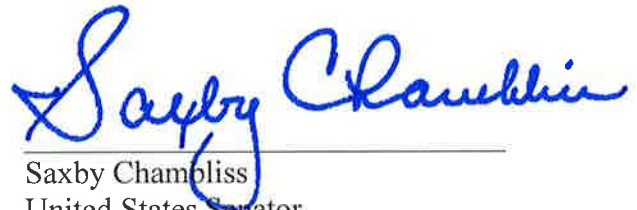
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Saxby Chambliss
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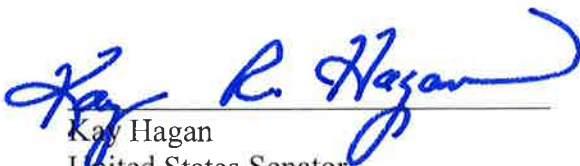
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Tom Harkin
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Mazie K. Hirono
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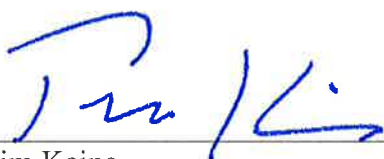
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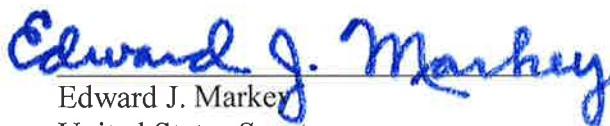
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John McCain
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Mitch McConnell
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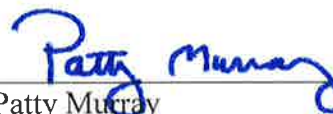
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Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



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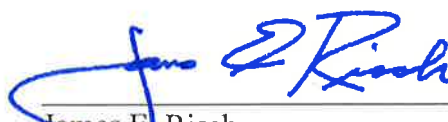
Bill Nelson
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Rand Paul
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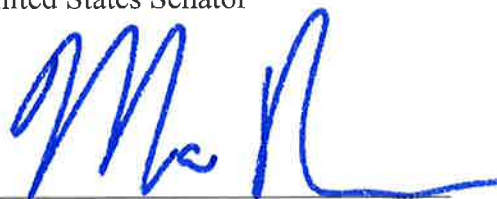
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James E. Risch
United States Senator



Pat Roberts
United States Senator



Marco Rubio
United States Senator



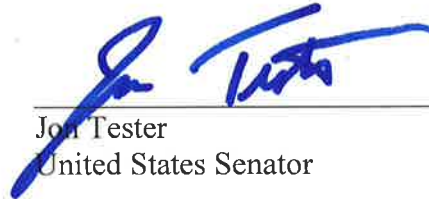
Tim Scott
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



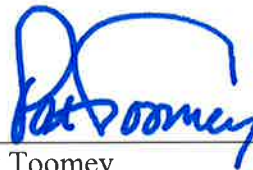
Debbie Stabenow
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Jon Tester
United States Senator



John Thune
United States Senator



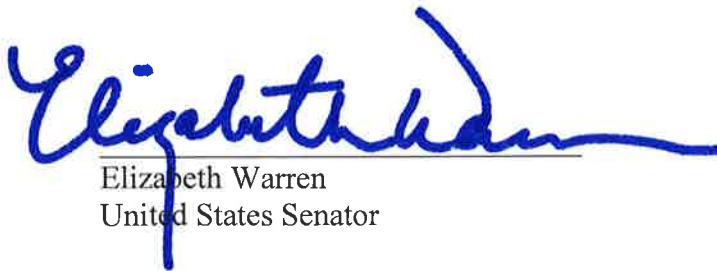
Pat Toomey
United States Senator



David Vitter
United States Senator



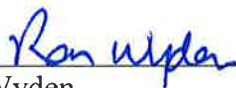
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