

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 13, 2015

The Honorable John Thune
Chairman
Committee on Commerce, Science, &
Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Nelson
Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce, Science, &
Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kelly Ayotte
Chair
Subcommittee on Aviation Operations,
Safety, and Security
Committee on Commerce, Science, &
Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Aviation Operations,
Safety, and Security
Committee on Commerce, Science, &
Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Thune, Ranking Member Nelson, Chair Ayotte, and Ranking Member Cantwell:

As you consider legislation to reauthorize the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), we urge you to include a provision reforming the cost benefit analysis process used by the FAA to manage Federal contract towers to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Federal Contract Tower program.

The Federal contract tower program, in place for over 30 years, has exemplified how the private sector and the Federal government can form and implement a working partnership aimed at improving air safety. Currently, 252 airports and their surrounding communities across the nation benefit from Federal contract towers that buttress a unified national air traffic control system and play a vital role in connecting smaller airports and rural communities with the national air transportation system.

The Federal contract tower program is one of 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. Repeated studies by the United States Department of Transportation Inspector General have shown that the Federal contract tower program increases aviation safety while reducing costs to taxpayers and the FAA.

In order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the highly successful Federal contract tower program, we urge the inclusion of a provision reforming the cost benefit analysis process used by the FAA to manage Federal contract towers in three ways.

First, remove the burden of subjecting Federal contract towers to repeated and often unnecessary cost-benefit analyses conducted by FAA. For any airport seeking to enter the Federal contract tower program, FAA performs a rigorous cost-benefit analysis to ensure the safety benefits provided by a manned tower will outweigh the necessary economic costs. Congress should establish an air traffic threshold trigger for future cost-benefit analyses once a tower has been admitted into the program. As such, FAA would be able to better focus resources on operations

to ensure the safety of the national airspace, instead of continually conducting assessments on contract tower airports maintaining steady levels of air traffic.

Second, reform the costs FAA should be considering when conducting a cost-benefit analysis. We urge that FAA only consider costs that would disappear if the tower were to be closed. At this time, FAA is revising its methodology used for cost-benefit analysis that we believe unfairly increases the costs included in their analysis, discounting the safety benefits provided by contract towers. For example, including the indirect costs of operating a national air traffic control system should not be used in the cost-benefit analysis of an individual contract tower as those costs are inherent to the system itself.

Third, provide airports and community stakeholders the opportunity to maintain an open dialogue with FAA to fully participate in the cost-benefit analysis process, which would include the opportunity to respond to an unfavorable cost-benefit analysis before a final report is issued.

Congress has clearly demonstrated numerous times—in bipartisan and bicameral fashions—the merit and need for the federal contract tower program. We believe the inclusion of a provision reforming the cost benefit analysis process used by the FAA to manage Federal contract towers would ensure the long-term sustainability of the highly successful Federal contract tower program. Federal contract towers have played a central role for the past 30 years in efforts to manage the safety and efficiency of our nation's complex airspace. We look forward to working with you to ensure that the future success of the Federal contract tower program.

Sincerely,



James M. Inhofe
United States Senator



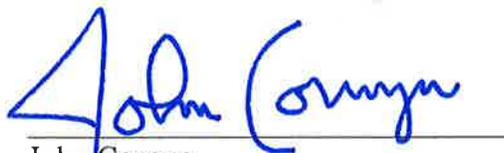
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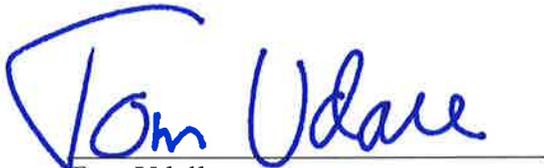
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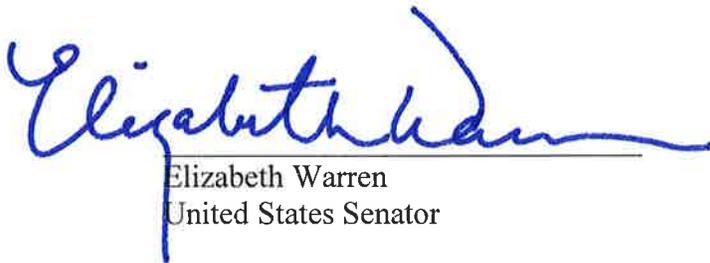
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