

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 23, 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 protect and maintain the Federal Contract Tower Program, especially in light of its importance in supporting the readiness and training of our military.

Many airports participating in the Federal Contract Tower Program are located near or adjacent to military bases and serve as significant readiness or training facilities for military units – Active, Guard and Reserve. The manned towers at these airports ensure the airspace is controlled to safely support the volume training and other operations conducted by our military. In fact, contract towers nationwide handled over 1.3 million military-related operations in 2014. This active military/civilian collaboration aids in strengthening our national security. Without the Federal Contract Tower Program, the vast majority of these airports would be unable to continue operating a tower. As a result, the military units actively using these airports would be forced to significantly curtail their activities or operate from more distant, busier airports that support substantial commercial aviation operations.

Attached is a detailed report on FAA contact tower airports that have substantial military-related operations – 73 airports in 33 states plus Puerto Rico. For example, military units, including active duty Air Force and South Dakota Air National Guard, perform 8,000 operations annually at Rapid City Regional Airport in South Dakota. Further, Cecil Field Airport in Jacksonville, Florida, supports over 47,000 annual military and national security operations, including the U.S. Coast Guard, Customs and Border Protection, Fleet Readiness Center Southeast and the Florida Army National Guard. We hope this information proves helpful in informing your efforts to reauthorize the FAA.

The federal contract tower program, in place for more than 30 years, is a prime example of an effective public-private partnership between government and the private sector that has improved aviation safety. Currently, 252 airports and their surrounding communities benefit from the federally funded towers, which operate as one of FAA's most cost-effective programs for taxpayers. Contract towers handle approximately 28 percent of the nation's air traffic control tower operations but account for only 14 percent of FAA's total tower operations budget. Repeated studies by the U.S. Transportation Department Inspector General have shown that the contract tower program increases aviation safety while reducing costs to taxpayers and the federal government. Also, it is important to note that approximately 80 percent of the contract controller workforce is veterans.

Congress has demonstrated numerous times—in bipartisan and bicameral fashion—the merit and need for the Federal Contract Tower Program. The attached document detailing the extensive number of military-related operations handled by contract towers across the nation is more evidence of the cost-effective benefits provided by this important program. We look forward to working with you to ensure the continued success of this program.

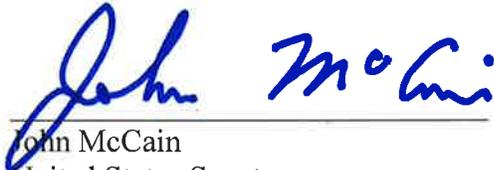
Sincerely,



James M. Inhofe  
United States Senator



Joe Manchin III  
United States Senator



John McCain  
United States Senator