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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6025

<http://appropriations.senate.gov>

February 28, 2017

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

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

Dear Chairman Thune and Ranking Member Nelson:

We are writing to express our concerns regarding any legislation that would separate the air traffic control functions of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) from critical safety and other programs within the agency and remove those functions from the congressional appropriations oversight process.

The United States is a world leader in aviation, with the largest, most complex air transportation system in the world. We are also a world leader in aviation safety, as commercial aviation fatalities are at historic lows, yet the FAA continues to innovate and improve its approach to safety oversight and to upgrade the air traffic control system through NextGen. NextGen is delivering real cost-saving benefits that are improving the way air traffic flows, while also providing advanced procedures, technologies, and tools that allow commercial airlines to carry more passengers and cargo on schedule, on-time, and safely to their destinations, while burning less fuel and producing fewer emissions. Through 2016, airspace improvements have provided \$2.72 billion in savings and are projected to provide more than \$160 billion by 2030, at a cost of \$35 billion to the FAA and stakeholders.

Modernization of our air traffic management system is ever-evolving as technology rapidly changes. The FAA has done a commendable job balancing diverse stakeholder priorities while rolling out new NextGen capabilities. This NextGen progress is due to the FAA and aviation stakeholders working collaboratively on advancing the needs of the airline industry, while balancing the complex needs of the entire aviation community. If air traffic control were separated during this critical period of technological advancement, the progress already being made to synchronize investment from government and industry related to safety, equipment, training, operational changes, and overall integration would be lost. It does not appear to make sense to break apart the FAA, an essential part of our success in aviation.

Furthermore, the public would not be well-served by exempting any part of the FAA from annual congressional oversight. A privatized system would provide consumers with no recourse for complaints or mistreatment, as it currently does through the U.S. Department of Transportation or their Members of Congress. The annual appropriations process provides the oversight of agency resources necessary to ensure accountability for program performance and a sustained focus on aviation safety. Assertions of a lack of stable funding for the FAA are simply inaccurate. In fact, the Appropriations Committee has protected and prioritized funding for the Air Traffic Organization (ATO) by providing more than 99 percent of the Administration's budget request since 2008. It is evident that funding for the ATO has been and remains a top priority of this Committee. Annual oversight also ensures that the FAA maintains a system that works throughout the aviation industry, including for general aviation, small and rural communities, commercial airlines, and large metropolitan cities.

The current authorization for the FAA's programs activities expires at the end of this fiscal year. We appreciate the importance of your work to ensure the next authorization supports aviation safety and addresses important issues, such as the modernization of our air traffic control system, the timely certification of aviation products, and the integration of unmanned aerial systems and commercial spacecraft into our national airspace. These efforts would be undermined, devastating a core component of our economy, if any legislation seeks to separate the ATO from the rest of the FAA's operations. We stand ready to work with you to improve our national aviation system but want to express our concerns about any legislation that breaks apart the FAA.

Sincerely,



Thad Cochran, Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510



Patrick Leahy, Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510



Susan Collins, Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing and Urban Development
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510



Jack Reed, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing and Urban Development
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