FAA Unions Tell Congress Not to Privatize the Air Traffic Control System

Today, the Professional Aviation Safety Specialists, AFL-CIO (PASS), along with six other unions representing thousands of employees at the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), joined together in opposing the privatization of this country's air traffic control system. Specifically, the federal labor unions rejected language in the Aviation Innovation, Reform, and Reauthorization (AIRR) Act (H.R.4441) that privatizes the U.S. air traffic control system into a not-for-profit corporation. In addition to PASS, the letter was signed by the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees (AFSCME), Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA), National Association of Government Employees (NAGE), National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE), and Professional Association of Aeronautical Center Employees (PAACE).

"On behalf of the thousands of FAA employees we represent, we are writing to state our opposition to language included in the Aviation Innovation, Reform, and Reauthorization (AIRR) Act (H.R.4441) that privatizes the FAA's air traffic control system into a not-for-profit corporation," stated the unions. "The United States has the safest and largest aviation system in the world and that system should continue to be operated solely for the public's benefit and safety."

The seven unions outlined their concerns with the privatization of the air traffic control system, including the need to continue progress made through the Next Generation Air Transportation Program (NextGen). "Now is not the time to interrupt efforts to modernize the air traffic control system. Now is the time to move forward, continuing to allow the introduction of new technologies, doing so with a cohesive group of federal employees from every division of the agency," stated the unions. "Privatizing the system jeopardizes NextGen and introduces uncertainty into the future of modernization. At a minimum, privatization will likely result in modernization coming to a standstill during the lengthy transition period as the corporation is formed and developed."

In addition, the unions are concerned with separating out air traffic services from the remainder of the agency and raised specific concerns regarding funding and congressional oversight. The groups recognized that funding issues need to be addressed at the FAA, but warned that this is not a reason to overhaul the system. "Now is the time for Congress to address the issue of sequestration and work to ensure that the FAA is consistently and adequately funded," they emphasized. "Removing the air traffic control system from federal oversight does not solve the funding problem."

The unions also called attention to provisions of the legislation that change current labor laws and the impact this will have on represented employees. Under the legislation, employees are not guaranteed access to a grievance process, whistleblower protections are severely cut, and changes are made to future pay, healthcare and retirement benefits. "Essentially, H.R.4441 takes today's labor framework and removes major pieces of the law or considerably weakens it," said the unions.

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The unions concluded the letter by asking committee members to work to include language in the legislation that retains the current FAA structure but insulates it from the impacts of sequestration. “We cannot support efforts to privatize [air traffic control] activities and we ask members of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee to oppose H.R.4441 in its current form.We look forward to working with members of the committee in order to reauthorize the FAA and ensure the agency remains a single cohesive unit working together for the safety and efficiency of the U.S. aviation system.”

To read the full text of the letter, please click here.

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