United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 2, 2013

The Honorable Ray LaHood
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

The Honorable Michael Huerta
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Secretary LaHood and Administrator Huerta:

As you know, Congress recently passed legislation giving the Secretary of Transportation the flexibility needed to avert air traffic controller furloughs and contract tower closures. We urge you to ensure that in addition to ending furloughs for 47,000 FAA employees, the agency also end the planned closure of 149 contract towers. This legislation gives FAA the flexibility and funding it needs to do both. Anything short of ending both the furloughs and contract tower closures would ignore the flexibility outlined in Section 2 (c). Our support of this legislation was based on the understanding that the contract towers could be fully funded.

While ending furloughs for tens of thousands of FAA personnel is a common sense decision due to the impact that flight delays had on the traveling public, we are equally concerned about the status of the contract tower program. The contract tower program is a vital public safety and economic development asset for dozens of communities – many of them rural – in every corner of the country. These municipalities depend on the contract tower program to provide commercial and general aviation services, jobs, and in many cases, support for a variety of air ambulance facilities. The disruption that the combined closure of 149 contract towers would have starting June 15th would certainly go against the recently enacted legislation, which allows the U.S. Department of Transportation to "prevent reduced operations and staffing of the FAA during FY 2013 to ensure a safe and efficient air transportation system."

By providing up to $253 million in funding authority – far above the amount required to prevent furloughs – Congressional intent is clear: the FAA should prevent the slated closure of 149 contract towers by fully funding the contract tower program.

Sincerely,

RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate

JERRY MORAN
United States Senate

KELLY AYOTTE
United States Senate

MAX BAUCUS
United States Senate

ROY BLUNT
United States Senate

JOHN BOOZMAN
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