

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 11, 2018

Daniel K. Elwell
Acting Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Acting Administrator Elwell:

As you begin implementing the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Reauthorization Act of 2018, we would like to draw your attention to section 152 of that Act. Section 152 authorizes the FAA to make grants from the small airport fund to an airport participating in the contract tower program for the purpose of constructing or improving its air traffic control tower and for the acquisition and installation of related equipment.

The contract tower program has been in place for over 30 years. Currently, there are 256 airports in 46 states that participate in this program and it consistently receives high marks for customer service from aviation users (pilots, airlines, FBOs, flight schools, and corporate flight departments). Without it, people living and traveling to small communities and rural areas would be without the important safety benefits that air traffic control provides.

Not only do contract towers provide an important safety service, they do it in a cost-effective manner. This is demonstrated by the fact that contract towers handle approximately 29 percent of all U.S. air traffic control tower operations, but account for just 11 percent of FAA's overall budget allotted to such operations. This means that the contract tower program saves the FAA and taxpayers approximately \$200 million per year and \$2 billion over a decade.

In addition to the safety and financial benefits, the contract tower program plays a key role in connecting rural communities to the national air transportation system, helping airports retain and develop commercial air service, and promoting economic development and job creation. It also provides significant support for military readiness and training as well as for disaster relief, homeland security, and law enforcement operations.

For all these reasons, the contract tower program enjoys widespread support in the Congress. That is why Congress included section 152, as well as other provisions to boost the contract tower program, in the FAA Reauthorization Act. It is important to note that this provision authorizing small airport funds for tower construction and improvement was placed in subsection (d) of section 47116 of the United States Code. Subsection (d) is entitled "Priority Consideration for Certain Projects." This provision could have been inserted in section 47124, but was placed in subsection 47116(d) precisely because Congress desired air traffic control tower construction and improvement projects to receive priority consideration for grants from the small airport fund. It is Congress's clear intent that tower construction, improvement, and related equipment should be given priority consideration when determining which projects should receive grants from the small airport fund. Priority consideration for these projects is fully justified in light of the safety, financial, and other benefits that these towers provide to small airports and rural areas.

We expect FAA to follow congressional intent in implementing this important provision that will enhance air traffic safety at smaller and rural airports throughout the country, including utilizing the benefit/cost ratios for new airport applicants/candidates that FAA submitted to Congress in April, 2018.

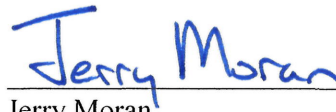
Additionally, we request that you explain to how the FAA will revise its National Priority Ranking and related order to ensure that funding for air traffic control tower construction, improvements, and related equipment receive the priority intended in the law. We also ask that, after the end of this fiscal year, you provide us with a list of the airports that requested money from the small airport fund for tower construction, improvement, or related equipment, a list of those airports that received such funds for that purpose, and a statement explaining why airports did not receive such funding even though it was requested.

We appreciate your attention to this timely matter and look forward to continuing to work with you in a constructive manner on this important issue.

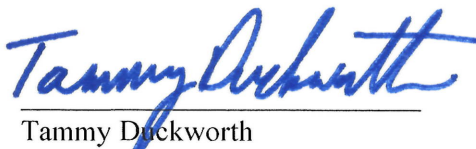
Sincerely,



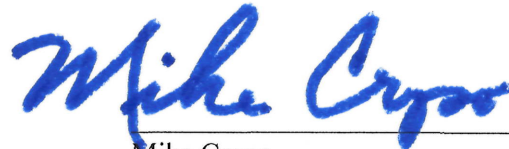
Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



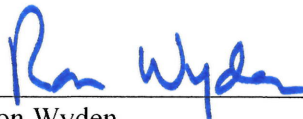
Jerry Moran
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



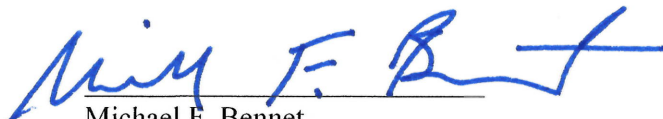
Mike Crapo
United States Senator



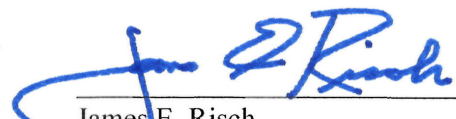
Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Deb Fischer
United States Senator



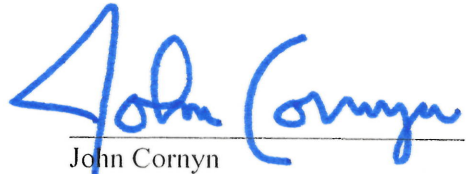
Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



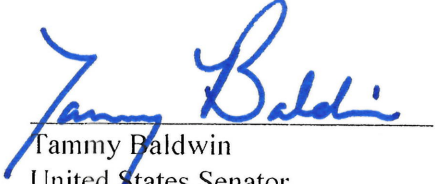
James E. Risch
United States Senator



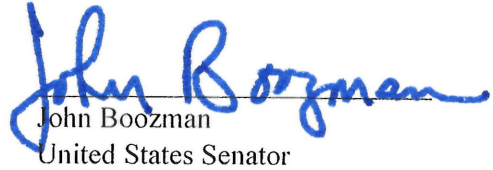
Mazie Hirono
United States Senator



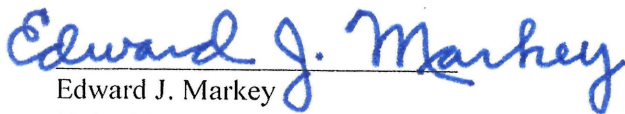
John Cornyn
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



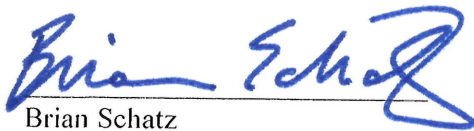
John Boozman
United States Senator



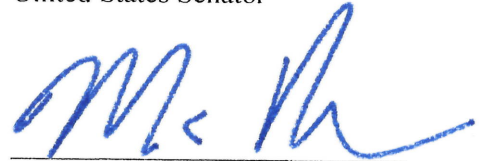
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Steve Daines
United States Senator



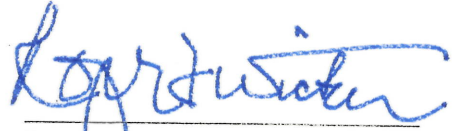
Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Marco Rubio
United States Senator



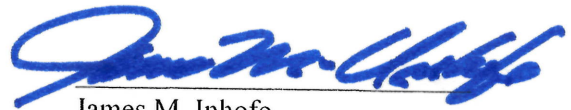
Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



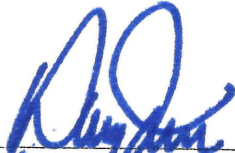
Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator



Bill Nelson
United States Senator



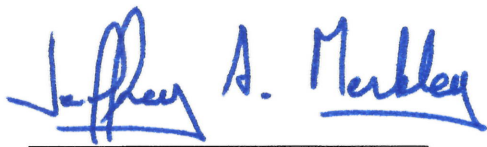
James M. Inhofe
United States Senator



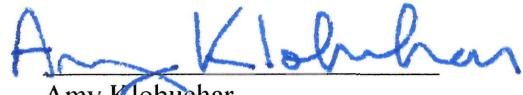
Doug Jones
United States Senator



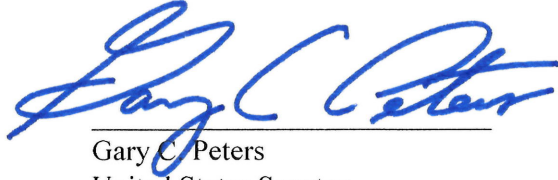
Tom Cotton
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



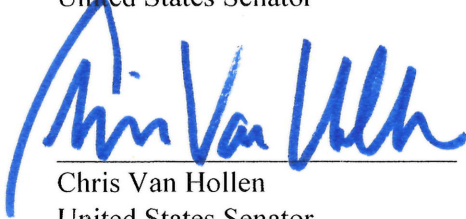
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



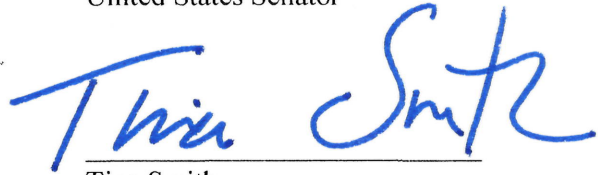
Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



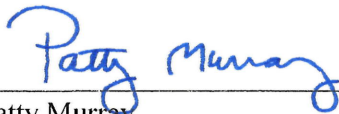
Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



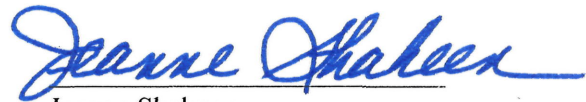
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



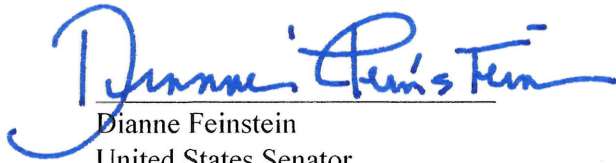
Tina Smith
United States Senator



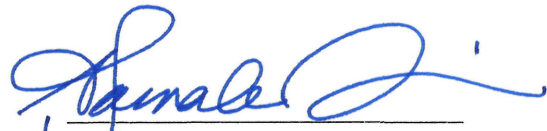
Patty Murray
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



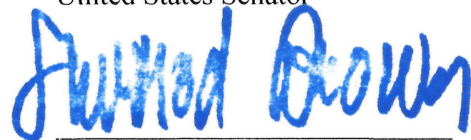
Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



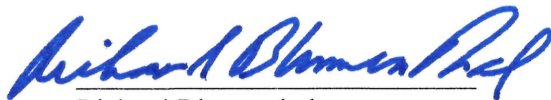
Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator



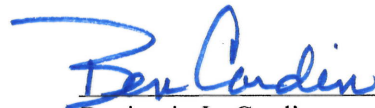
Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator