

DANIEL K. INOUE, HAWAII
JOHN F. KERRY, MASSACHUSETTS
BYRON L. DORGAN, NORTH DAKOTA
BARBARA BOXER, CALIFORNIA
BILL NELSON, FLORIDA
MARIA CANTWELL, WASHINGTON
FRANK R. LAUTENBERG, NEW JERSEY
MARK PRYOR, ARKANSAS
CLAIRE McCASKILL, MISSOURI
AMY KLOBUCHAR, MINNESOTA
TOM UDALL, NEW MEXICO
MARK WARNER, VIRGINIA
MARK BEGICH, ALASKA

KAY BAILEY HUTCHISON, TEXAS
OLYMPIA J. SNOWE, MAINE
JOHN ENSIGN, NEVADA
JIM DEMINT, SOUTH CAROLINA
JOHN THUNE, SOUTH DAKOTA
ROGER F. WICKER, MISSISSIPPI
GEORGE S. LEMIEUX, FLORIDA
JOHNNY ISAKSON, GEORGIA
DAVID VITTER, LOUISIANA
SAM BROWNBACK, KANSAS
MIKE JOHANNIS, NEBRASKA

ELLEN DONESKI, STAFF DIRECTOR
ANN BEGEMAN, ACTING REPUBLICAN STAFF DIRECTOR

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,
AND TRANSPORTATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6125

WEB SITE: <http://commerce.senate.gov>

April 4, 2011

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

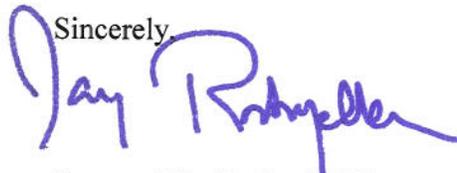
Dear Secretary LaHood:

I support the swift actions being taken by the Department of Transportation (DOT) to address the problems with air traffic controller (ATC) staffing levels highlighted by the incident last week at Washington National Airport (DCA). It is troubling that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) only required one controller to be on duty at this critical metropolitan airport when overnight passenger aircraft operations are scheduled. Clearly, adding another controller to the night shift at DCA, and having the agency assess staffing levels at airports throughout the National Airspace System (NAS) are necessary actions to make certain that effective measures are in place to prevent similar incidents in the future.

As you know, ATC staffing levels are a concern throughout the NAS, not just at DCA. To this end, S. 223, the FAA Transportation Modernization and Safety Improvement Act, takes important steps to address this issue. Last month, S. 223 passed the Senate with strong bi-partisan support. It requires the National Academy of Sciences to conduct an independent review of how the FAA determines appropriate ATC staffing levels at facilities throughout the nation. I am working to guarantee that a final FAA package pass into law as soon as possible, and I expect the Administration to strongly support this effort.

I also have concerns about the implications of the FAA's fiscal year (FY) 2012 budget on critical safety initiatives. I understand, and support, the Administration's efforts to impose fiscal restraint on the Federal budget. Proposals in Congress for across the board cuts, however, have real safety implications that cannot be ignored. Last week's incident, for example, highlights the need to provide adequate funding for air traffic controllers. I strongly oppose any cuts that threaten the safety of our Nation's air transportation system.

Sincerely,



Senator John D. Rockefeller, IV
Chairman
Senate Committee on
Commerce, Science, and Transportation