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November 20, 2007

Mr. Henry P. Krakowski  
Chief Operating Officer, Air Traffic Organization  
Federal Aviation Administration  
800 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Mr. Krakowski,

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) fulfills a vital role, ensuring we have a safe and viable air transportation system to serve the needs of our nation. Given this important role, I am writing seeking to work with you in ensuring the continued safety of the airspace around Illinois' 6<sup>th</sup> Congressional District.

I represent a portion of the western and northwestern suburbs of Chicago. Chicago's O'Hare International Airport is located in my Congressional District. The airport sits directly adjacent to homes, schools, and businesses that employ thousands. Thus, I sincerely hope that we can work together to ensure the safety of the environment around the airport.

On November 15, 2007, the Chicago Tribune reported that a Chicago-bound jet came within seconds of a midair collision at 25,000 feet over Indiana. A cockpit safety device alerted the pilots in one of the planes of the danger in time for the pilots to take action to avoid a collision. Yesterday, there was another story in the Chicago Tribune that described another similar incident.

Any air traffic control mistake that resulted in a mid-air collision would be a tragedy not only for those on board the airplanes, but also for those who live and work around the crash site. The aftermath of a mid-air collision could be devastating to my Congressional District.

Accordingly, I am inquiring about the adequacy of staffing levels in our nation's air traffic control system. It has been brought to my attention that recently there have been a great number of retirements of the most seasoned air traffic controllers, and that there are even many more currently eligible, or about to become eligible, to retire.

It is my hope that you can address the following questions so that I might be better able to assist the FAA in maintaining a safe and sound air traffic system.

*Are we currently operating with adequate staffing levels in our air traffic control facilities?*

It has been brought to my attention that the Chicago Air Route Traffic Control Center currently has 340 fully trained controllers on staff, with 85 trainees, down from 380 and 45, respectively, just 14 months ago. Further, the O'Hare Air Traffic Control Tower is down from 51 to 38 fully trained controllers, and 20 to 16 trainees. I am concerned we may be stretching our controllers thinly; what assurances do we have that these reduced staffing levels are not coming at the expense of public safety?

*What procedures are in place, and how will they be applied to the situations recently reported in the Chicago Tribune, to address mistakes that result in near collisions?*

What mechanisms are in place to reduce or eliminate the occurrence of errors in the future? If our air traffic control staff is already stretched thinly, how can we address concerns without exacerbating the problem?

*What steps is the FAA taking to maintain and enhance the safety of our air traffic system?*

Given that a significant portion of our current stock of air traffic controllers was hired en bloc in the early 1980s, and given that many of those are soon eligible to retire, what is the FAA doing to maintain a vibrant group of air traffic controllers? It is concerning that the number of air traffic controllers currently working is fewer than the number just a few years ago. On top of that, if many in our current stock are able to retire, how is the FAA working to ensure we are not left with a thin field of air traffic controllers with little experience?

Thank you for your attention to this matter of great importance to the people of Illinois' 6<sup>th</sup> Congressional District and the larger Chicagoland area. If you require further information to complete your responses to my questions above, please contact David Mork on my staff at 202-225-4561.

Very Truly Yours,



Peter J. Roskam  
Member of Congress

Cc: Secretary Mary E. Peters  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Ave SE  
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Mr. Robert A. Sturgell  
Acting Administrator  
Federal Aviation Administration  
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