



Senator Feinstein Calls on FAA Administrator to Address Agency's Air Traffic Controller Staffing Shortages

September 11, 2006

Washington, DC – Citing the recent air traffic control tragedy in Kentucky caused by understaffing, U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) today called on the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to immediately address the agency's serious staffing shortages.

In a letter to FAA Administrator Marion C. Blakey, Senator Feinstein also referenced problems arising from staffing shortfalls at the world's busiest air traffic control facility, the Southern California Terminal Radar Approach Control facility (So-Cal TRACON).

The following is the text of the letter sent by Senator Feinstein to FAA Administrator Blakey:

September 8, 2006

The Honorable Marion C. Blakey
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW, Room 1010
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Blakey:

I am writing to express my deep concerns about the safety of our nation's skies. I strongly believe that the FAA needs to take aggressive action to hire and retain additional air traffic controllers in order to avoid another tragedy, such as the one that occurred last month in Kentucky.

As you are already aware, the number of active Air Traffic Controllers has been on a steady decline over the past several years, while our nation's air traffic has been on the rise. According to the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, the volume of air traffic in the United States today has returned to levels that existed before September 11, 2001. However, there are currently 1,100 fewer air traffic controllers working to patrol the skies than prior to September 11th.

The effects of this staffing reduction have been felt throughout the country—most recently, in the tragic accident that claimed the lives of 49 people in Kentucky when a Comair flight crashed shortly after taking off a runway that was too short. At the time of the crash, there was only one controller in the tower at the Blue Grass Airport, a violation of FAA rules.

The lack of air traffic controllers is extremely concerning to my State of California. As the *San Diego Union Tribune* recently reported in the attached article entitled “Overworked Eyes Watching the Sky,” the Southern California Terminal Radar Approach Control facility (So-Cal TRACON) is the busiest facility of its kind in the world, handling as many as 7,000 aircraft a day and monitoring all traffic from Burbank to the U.S.-Mexico border. Yet over the past three years, there has been a decrease in staffing levels, in conjunction with an increase in controller errors. In 2004, there were 12 errors reported by controllers, and already this year there have been 20. This is unacceptable.

It is apparent that as time goes on, this problem will only become greater, and more American lives will be put in danger. I would encourage you to make air traffic control staffing your number one priority. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

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