



February 5, 2016

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Majority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steny Hoyer
Minority Whip
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan, Leader McCarthy, Leader Pelosi, Mr. Scalise, and Mr. Hoyer:

Congress is about to consider legislation to privatize our air traffic control system.

We write to express our grave concern about any proposals which would take authority over our air transportation system and turn it over to an entity which would serve private interests rather than the public. We believe a shift of this core public responsibility could have significant negative impact on rural communities, consumers and citizens across the country.

Our air traffic control system is an important public benefit that protects our consumers and ensures the ability of passengers and freight to fly to communities large and small. Yet, in recent years, consumer complaints against the commercial airlines are at unprecedented levels, routes to small and mid-sized towns have been cut by 20%, and the never ending proliferation of fees and charges have left consumers feeling at the mercy of airlines. Meanwhile, the airlines are raking in high profits from record baggage fees, and all of this is the direct result of increased power and consolidation.

As a result, before considering any proposals to change the governance and authority of our air transportation system, we believe that Congress should convene immediate hearings in order to answer the following questions:

First and foremost, how would a privatized system ensure that the commercial airlines are not able to influence significant changes or investment decisions that could impact other stakeholders and negatively impact exacerbate customer service, or the timeliness or affordability of air travel in all parts of the country?

If the commercial airlines are basically governing themselves, what recourses would consumers have for complaints and mistreatment? How will public oversight be structured and how will we guarantee that adequate resources are allocated for robust monitoring and rigorous oversight?

How would a privatized system protect rural consumers and ensure consumers' access to small and mid-sized airports? Already, large commercial airlines have cut their routes by 20% and one CEO has stated that “modernization” efforts would be used to concentrate resources at their most profitable routes in the Northeast.

How will we guarantee that medical flights on smaller aircraft can get in to an airport near a specialty health care center and ensure that financial interests don't create perverse incentives or prioritize balance sheet concerns that create situations that could endanger Americans in need of emergency medical care? Would local cities and towns be increasingly saddled with the costs of keeping their airports open?

Would privatizing air traffic control give the airlines and any other private interests the ability to directly influence or impose new taxes and fees on air travel?

How would placing more control in the hands of commercial airlines impact issues such as gate access and funding of airports?

The details which have been released to date have failed to adequately address these concerns, and we are extremely concerned that any move to privatize our air traffic control system and put more control over the fate of small communities and consumers in the hands of the commercial airlines would be extremely detrimental to our traveling public.

We look forward to working with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Donald Cohen
Executive Director
In The Public Interest

Sally Greenberg
Executive Director
National Consumers League

Clare Crawford
Executive Director
Center on Policy Initiatives

Derecka Mehrens
Executive Director
Working Partnerships USA

Selena Shilad
Executive Director
Alliance for Aviation Across America