

April 7, 2016

Members of the U.S. Senate

Re: Support for Air Traffic Control Reform from Former Clinton Administration Officials

Dear Members of the U.S. Senate:

In recent weeks, Congress has begun consideration of legislation to reform the structure and financing of the Federal Aviation Administration's Air Traffic Organization. One leading proposal would move the ATO to a non-profit corporation that would be financed by users and regulated for safety at arm's length by the FAA. We believe this type of reform is needed. Numerous expert panels and studies have recommended "corporatization" of air traffic control, and both Democratic and Republican Administrations have proposed it in the past.

We participated in the effort by President Clinton and Vice President Gore to move air traffic control to a government corporation, so that it could operate more like a business and borrow on the capital markets to finance long-term capital investments. A key goal was to accelerate the FAA's effort to modernize its system by (among other things) shifting from 1950s-era ground-based radar to satellite-based navigation—an effort that was plagued by delays and cost overruns.

Two decades later, delays and cost overruns continue to plague the FAA's effort to adopt next-generation satellite-based technology (NEXTGEN), and air traffic controllers still keep track of aircraft using paper strips. In recent years, uncertainty as to the magnitude and timing of federal funding for NEXTGEN—a problem that is likely to get even worse—has added to the FAA's challenges.

Additional evidence that the Clinton Administration was right to pursue air traffic control reform comes from the actions of other countries. Two decades ago, only four countries had corporatized their air traffic control systems. Today, more than 60 other countries have done so. A dozen independent studies by the Government Accountability Office and others show that, after the change, air traffic control safety in these countries improved or remained the same and efficiency increased.

This letter is not meant as a plea to support a particular piece of legislation. Rather, our intent is to communicate the importance of structural

reform of air traffic control, generally, and to make it clear that Democrats and Republicans alike have long advocated such reform.

We are heartened by the support for reform shown by the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, which represents 17,000 FAA employees.

Air traffic control reform is long overdue in this country. We hope it will receive bipartisan support in Congress.

Sincerely,

Federico Pena
Secretary of Transportation, 1993-1997

Norman Mineta*
Secretary of Transportation, 2001-2006

Peter Orszag**
Director, Office of Management and Budget, 2009-2010

Joshua Gotbaum***
Senior Official in the Departments of Defense and Treasury and the Office of Management and Budget, 1993-2001

Elaine Kamarck
Director, National Performance Review, 1993-1997

Dorothy Robyn***
Special Assistant to the President for Economic Policy, 1993-2001

Gerald Baliles
Governor of Virginia (1986-1990) and Chairman of the 1993 National Commission to Ensure a Strong Competitive Airline Industry

*Mineta served as the Secretary of Commerce in the Clinton Administration

**Orszag served in several senior economic advisory positions in the Clinton Administration

***Gotbaum and Robyn also held senior political positions in the Obama Administration