

June 26, 2017

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U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 1.6 million members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, (AFSCME) I am writing in opposition to H.R. 2997, the 21st Century Aviation Innovation, Reform, and Reauthorization (AIRR) Act. The bill, as introduced, has the potential to threaten safe and efficient air travel for many Americans, weaken the overall national economy, and harm the federal workforce that is dedicated to the safe and efficient aviation all Americans deserve and expect.

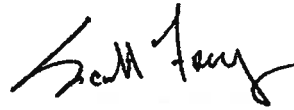
AFSCME is strongly opposed to efforts to privatize the nation's air traffic control operations. Air traffic safety must be our chief concern and that requires responsible governmental control and continued strong oversight. The bill, as proposed, would transfer control of the air traffic system to an unaccountable nonprofit entity with a board dominated by private interests. A privatized system would allow the public interest to take a backseat to private interests in decisions over the use of air space.

A major goal should be the modernization of the air traffic system, but the biggest obstacle to modernization is the fact that that Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has had to grapple with budgetary uncertainty along with all other federal agencies. According to the FAA's own website, "for some time there has been an environment of instability and unpredictability that has undermined the FAA's ability to effectively perform its safety and efficiency mission while managing modernization and key initiatives." The serious lack of financial commitment and budgetary certainty is what has slowed the FAA's modernization of air traffic control. Rather than pursue privatization schemes that put safety at risk, we urge the Congress to provide the necessary investment needed to modernize the system.

In spite of fiscal uncertainty, the U.S. still has the safest air traffic system in the world. We should not put that at risk by elevating private interests over the public interest. A large factor in that record is the commitment of dedicated public servants. Unfortunately, this legislation changes the rules for many FAA employees. In fact, many would see their jobs lost to privatization, while others, especially those hired after privatization would not be eligible for the same pay and benefits provided to current FAA employees.

AFSCME cannot support any legislation that doesn't protect the public interest, promote a strong economy, and protect the workforce. We urge members of the Committee to oppose the bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott Frey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "S".

Scott Frey
Director of Federal Government Affairs

SF/EJ:mc