

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 11, 2008

Robert A. Sturgell  
Acting Administrator  
Federal Aviation Administration  
800 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Sturgell:

We are writing to express our concern about the increased challenges facing air traffic controllers at General Mitchell International Airport in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. We have heard from a growing number of constituents about mounting shortages of controllers as well as a lack of training for new controllers. And while the current lack of trained controllers is a cause for concern, we believe an impending expansion of the Milwaukee air space could greatly exacerbate the situation and strain the system's ability to ensure public safety.

Full staffing for the Milwaukee Approach Area would require 51 air traffic control specialists. But the current staffing level is only 40 air traffic controllers, with two specialists scheduled to retire this month. This staffing shortage -- of almost 30% -- already requires longer work days and only one day off per week at the facility.

The FAA is facing shortages and a high retirement rate nationwide, which leads us to wonder whether the concerns expressed to us by Wisconsinites are part of a broader, systemic problem. Our constituents have also warned that overly burdensome work schedules such as those in Milwaukee, combined with working under an FAA-imposed contract, have led to low morale among employees and encouraged retirements. With an agency facing major staff shortages, this is a move in the wrong direction and has the potential to become a negative feedback loop as retirements and shortages mount.

Of more immediate concern for Milwaukee air traffic controllers is the doubling of the airspace under their control scheduled for February 14, 2008, when the Ripon Approach Control Area is added. We understand that this additional airspace will increase the necessary staffing level to 56 air traffic control specialists. In addition, expanding the air space requires additional training and certification, as the job requirements and procedures for the new airspace are somewhat different than those for the current airspace. Several constituents have expressed concerns that the training has predominately been in the classroom and has not included working live traffic under the supervision of experienced controllers. As of late January, we understand that only one air traffic control specialist was certified to work the Ripon Approach Area.

We find these reports from Wisconsin very troubling, and would like to know what long- and short-term actions the FAA is taking alleviate the growing stress on the air traffic control system nationwide and particularly in Wisconsin. We believe that the safety of the traveling public must remain paramount and hope that FAA policies will reflect that. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Russell D. Feingold



Herb Kohl