



U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

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LET'S SET THE FACTS STRAIGHT

VOTE "YES" ON HR 5449

Dear Colleague:

As we approach this week's debate on H.R. 5449, which ensures that the bargaining rights of air traffic controllers and other Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) employees are protected and similar to other federal workers, there have been many misleading statements designed to encourage a "No" vote.

Let me set the facts straight:

Claim: A "yes" vote on H.R. 5449 will cost the FAA \$1.9 billion over five years.

Fact: Nothing could be further from the truth. H.R. 5449 merely clarifies that labor-management disputes are governed by the provision of law authorizing the Federal Services Impasses Panel (FSIP) to resolve the dispute. **It does not mandate that either the FAA's or the National Air Traffic Controllers Association's (NATCA) proposals be implemented.** Under H.R. 5449, the parties would return to the bargaining table and, if a settlement could not be reached, the FSIP would have jurisdiction to resolve the dispute, including the power to impose binding arbitration on the parties.

In fact, the FSIP arbitration procedure was recently used to settle several issues regarding pay for the Security and Exchange Commission (SEC) and its employees – *in favor of the SEC's position!*

Moreover, the \$1.9 billion figure represents the savings that FAA says it will achieve if its contract is implemented. NATCA's proposal would permit a savings of at least \$1.3 billion over the current contract. Even the FAA Administrator admits that the gap between FAA's and NATCA's proposal is only \$600 million. Of course, under H.R. 5449, FSIP could accept FAA's proposal, as they did in the SEC's case.

Claim: The current average annual FAA air traffic controller compensation (salary & benefits) is \$173,000.

Fact: This number is very misleading. Approximately 40 percent of the controllers' compensation is in the form of federal health and retirement benefits that all government employees and Members of Congress receive.

Claim: Air traffic controller salaries have increased 75 percent since 1998.

Fact: This statement blatantly ignores the fact that nearly 60 percent of these increases are attributable to government-wide pay raises. Most of the remainder comes from a one-time reclassification to recognize the responsibility of controlling traffic in busy facilities. In 1998, salaries increased on average by 15 percent, phased in over 3 years, as a result of the new pay scale.

Claim: Under FAA's proposal, new controllers hired in FY 2007 would make \$93,400 in base, locality, and premiums within five years.

Fact: This claim assumes that a new hire would be placed in one of the busiest facilities in the nation, such as Chicago's O'Hare. Today, because of the difficulty of the job, only experienced controllers go to high-level facilities, such as Chicago O'Hare. A new controller with five years on the job at mid-level facilities such as Sioux City or Midway-Chicago, where the FAA will likely send new hires, would only make **between \$45,000 and \$69,000 per year** under the FAA proposal.

I urge a "yes" vote on H.R. 5449. It represents a reasonable compromise to protect collective bargaining rights and promotes good faith, fair negotiations between FAA and its employees.

Sincerely,


James L. Oberstar
Ranking Democratic Member