



Reps. Lipinski, Hultgren Introduce SAFE TOWERS Act to Fix FAA's Flawed New Hiring Procedure for Air Traffic Controllers

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Rep. Dan Lipinski (IL-3) has joined with Rep. Randy Hultgren (IL-14) to introduce the Standards Addressing Federal Transparency and Oversight With Evolving Recruitment Specifications (SAFE TOWERS) Act. The bill reverses the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) convoluted and confusing new hiring process, which has passed over the most qualified air traffic controller candidates and raised concerns about safety and transparency.

For decades, the FAA has relied on colleges and universities to prepare air traffic controllers through the Collegiate Training Initiative (CTI), ensuring candidates are well-trained for the position. This year, the FAA changed its hiring practices with few details given about how the changes would be implemented and with little advance warning. The new procedures have resulted in students who have spent large amounts of time and money training to be air traffic controllers unjustly disqualified by the opaque Biographical Questionnaire (Bio Q). In addition, many have "aged out" after turning 31 during the application process, thus becoming ineligible for the job for which they were specifically trained.

"When it comes to hiring air traffic controllers, we must make sure we are doing everything we can to ensure the safety of the flying public," said Rep. Lipinski. "The hiring process seems to have been working well in regard to safety, so it is unclear why these changes were made.

"Lewis University in Romeoville has one of the premier CTI programs in the nation," continued Lipinski. "For years its graduates, along with our military controllers, have gone on to proudly work for the FAA. Now, with these hastily implemented hiring procedures, the FAA is turning its back on the students and brave veterans that should be the backbone of our air traffic control system, in favor of a process that lacks transparency."

"The SAFE TOWERS Act is targeted at making sure we have the best and brightest in our control towers. When you climb into an airliner, you trust the pilot, the crew, and air traffic controllers will keep you safe," said Rep. Hultgren. "The new hiring standards jeopardize air travel safety because they divert the hiring process around highly-qualified, CTI-certified trainees, in favor of 'off-the-street' candidates. I have met with air traffic controllers in my district, collegiate training initiative (CTI) students, teachers, and administrators who were blindsided by the FAA's decision after spending tens of thousands of dollars and hours in specialized training courses. The FAA has been non-responsive to inquiries about how hiring 'off-the-street' candidates make our skies safer. We still have more questions than answers."

Previously, Reps. Lipinski and Hultgren led a bipartisan group of the Illinois delegation in pressing U.S. Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx for answers regarding the FAA's new hiring procedures.

Among other provisions, the SAFE TOWERS Act would:

- Restore preferred status for CTI graduates with school recommendations and qualified veterans back into the hiring process.
- Eliminate the use of a Biographical Assessment that unduly disqualifies applicants.
- Allow candidates who will have aged out from the interim hiring process, or were deemed unqualified by the Bio Q, the chance to reapply.
- Establish an ATC Advisory Committee, composed of relevant educational institutions and organizations, to provide advice and recommendations to the Administrator of the FAA in regards to needs, objectives, plans, and content of air traffic control training programs.
- Requires an annual report from the Advisory Committee to Congress citing recommendations. The FAA must respond within 60 days explaining why they did or did not comply.
- Requires the FAA to notify Advisory Committee and CTI schools prior to any future changes in the hiring process and allow the schools an opportunity to comment.
- Requires the FAA take into consideration locally developed training initiatives at CTI schools when establishing best practices nationwide.