

Air traffic students at Mt SAC in Walnut tell congresswoman FAA diversity rules are unfair



U.S. Congresswoman Grace Napolitano listens to Mt. SAC Collegiate Training Initiative students on Thursday explain how they followed a two-year course of study for air traffic controller and passed an FAA test only to be rejected after being informed by email that they failed a biographical questionnaire. New FAA rules are stopping many highly qualified aeronautical graduates from the Walnut campus from getting jobs as air traffic controllers. Leo Jarzomb — Staff Photographer

By [Steve Scauzillo](#), San Gabriel Valley Tribune

4/17/14



Ehab Ibrahim, 30, of Beaumont, attended a meeting with U.S. Congresswoman Grace Napolitano to discuss how he and other aeronautical graduates were rejected for air traffic controller jobs after following a two-year course of study for air traffic controller and passing an FAA test. Because of FAA rules only applicants 18 to 30 will be considered by the federal agency and Ibrahim will be too old when the next round hiring occurs. Leo Jarzomb — Staff Photographer

WALNUT >> A dozen students whose applications for air traffic controller jobs were rejected by the Federal Aviation Administration because they failed a newly-instituted psychological screening test received assurances from a congresswoman that she'd investigate the matter.

Rep. Grace Napolitano, D-El Monte, visited Mt. San Antonio College Thursday and promised the aeronautical students she would get their voices heard in Washington, and if necessary, hand deliver their applications to FAA Administrator Michael P. Huerta.

Napolitano said the new “biographical questionnaire” instituted for the first time in February when the FAA set out to hire 1,300 flight controllers is denying qualified applicants with degrees in aviation science and in some cases, pilot licenses, a chance at a job.

About 92 percent of the 28,000 applicants failed the new screening tool, causing schools from California to Washington to complain that the cream of the crop are being left behind.

“Sometimes bureaucracies get in the way. It is consequences that they don’t realize,” Napolitano said during an exclusive interview Thursday at the college.

Napolitano dodged the question other Air Traffic Collegiate Training Initiative schools raised, namely that the FAA and President Barack Obama's Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx are trying to increase diversity among air traffic controllers by adjusting the hiring rules.

She said that depends on what one means by diversity, adding that federal agencies are under Congressional order to fill Affirmative Action quotas of minorities, namely African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics and Asians.

"We are trying to find out the minority participation," she said.

Napolitano, on a fact-finding mission, intimated that the FAA may not be accomplishing that goal with the new 62-question test but in fact, doing the opposite.

After speaking to the aide to ranking Democrat Rep. Rick Larsen on the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure's Subcommittee on Aviation, she said the committee may take up a bill or simply ask the FAA to do away with the new questionnaire.

Instructors and students at the college, one of only two with AT-CTI accreditation in the state, said for the first time since the program began in 1946, students are being rejected. About 20 percent of the air traffic controllers in the nation graduated from Mt. SAC, said Professor Robert Rogus, co-chairman of the program.

One student, Ehaab Ibrahim, 30, drove from Beaumont for a year to attend the program. After finishing 12 classes in two semesters, he earned a 4.0 GPA and a grade of 100 percent on the FAA's aptitude test for air traffic controller. But because he didn't pass the biographical questionnaire, his application was rejected.

"I feel like my opportunity was taken from me. I did everything they asked. I couldn't have gotten better than a 4.0 or 100 percent," Ibrahim said Thursday.

Because he turns 31 at the end of the year, he will no longer be eligible for the job as air traffic controller. The FAA has only allows applicants between the ages of 18 and 30.

Napolitano said she wanted to see if Ibrahim's application could be forwarded to the FAA before the next hiring period in January 2015, when it will be too late.

Other students voiced similar concerns during the meeting with the congresswoman. Some said they have friends who came from Hawaii to attend the Mt. SAC program. One student moved from San Jose to attend and get training at the college in order to be a more qualified applicant.

Napolitano urged students from the program to write a joint letter to the House committee and to FAA Chairman Huerta, which she said she will also sign.

"But I want to make sure they hear it from you," she told the students.