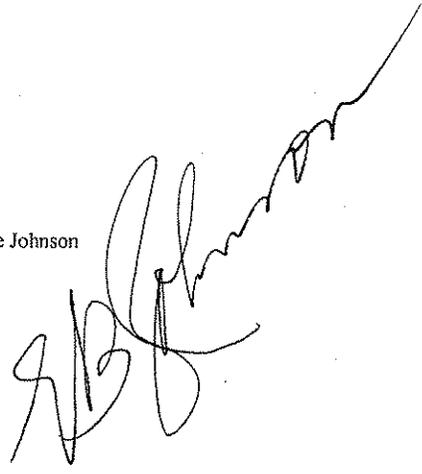


Opening Statement for the Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson
House Subcommittee on Aviation
Hearing on Air Traffic Controller Staffing
Wednesday, June 11, 2008 -- 2167 RHOB



Thank you Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank you and Ranking Member Petri for calling this important hearing on the issue of Air Traffic Control Facility Staffing.

The dedicated men and women who serve as air traffic controllers are an integral component to our nation's aviation system being one of the safest in the world.

By 2015, it is projected that one billion passengers will board planes domestically each year.

The safe and efficient movement of these passengers will depend on a viable, robust, and experienced fleet of air traffic controllers.

Mr. Chairman, the issue of Air Traffic Controller staffing is one of particular importance to me as the volume of alarming concern from controllers in my district—as well as controllers residing outside of my district—has consistently increased.

Coincidentally, on last evening I conducted a telephone town hall meeting with my constituents. This format allows me to stay in touch with my constituents while I'm here in Washington during the legislative work week.

I remember one caller in particular. The gentleman identified himself as an air traffic controller and expressed his frustration, hurt, and anger about current conditions concerning not only DFW TRACON, but similar conditions around the country.

The gentleman stated, “Ms. Johnson can you all please do something. Morale is the lowest it's ever been; we're experiencing a mass exodus of experience due to retirements;

and for this environment to continue only serves to undermine public confidence in the system.”

Mr. Chairman, it is my understanding that in the Dallas-area, the DFW TRACON currently has 57 Certified Professional Controllers and 23 trainees.

The FAA’s staffing range for the DFW TRACON is 80-98, which is predicated on budget and not a scientific staffing-standard. The previously agreed-upon staffing authorization level for the DFW TRACON, which was based on a scientific staffing-standard, was 117. Even using the FAA’s staffing range, DFW TRACON is critically understaffed.

As the GAO indicated in February of this year, with seventy-two percent of its controller workforce eligible for retirement in less than eight years, FAA has a huge staffing challenge on its hand that must be addressed now.

At every turn, the Agency has failed to account for shortages due to controller retirements.

According to GAO, in fiscal year 2006, FAA estimated 467 controllers would enter retirement—583 eventually retired. In fiscal year 2007 there were 828 retirements and FAA predicted only 700. We've simply got to turn this ship around.

As I close Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for your work and persistent oversight on this matter. This issue represents a challenge we simply can not allow to go unaddressed.

I want to thank the witnesses that have come before us this morning, and look forward to their testimony regarding this extremely important matter for the flying public.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and I yield back the balance of my time.