

Opening Statement
Congressman John T. Salazar
T&I Aviation Subcommittee Hearing
Hearing on Air Traffic Control Facility Staffing
June 11, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this very important hearing.

I'm very concerned with staffing shortages at our nation's air traffic control facilities.

To say that the FAA is facing staffing "challenges" is a vast, and dangerous, understatement.

I've raised concerns to the FAA about staffing shortages at many of the towers in Colorado.

At Pueblo, for instance, they are operating with 8 certified controllers, not the 12 which was previously agreed to, back in 1998.

They do have 6 trainees, but given the low retention and passage rate of the trainees, we cannot guarantee they will all become certified.

And at Aspen, they currently have 7 certified controllers, down from 15, with 3 in training.

If safety is the number one priority for the FAA, I do not understand how they allow towers to operate with such insufficient staffing numbers.

I have had numerous conversations with the FAA on the matter of consolidating the Pueblo TRACON to Denver.

And I'm not convinced that co-locating to Denver, which itself is under-staffed, is the best and safest idea.

While I can understand the desire to cut costs, I have serious concerns over the necessity for such moves and the possible safety issues that would result.

I look forward to the testimony today and I thank the panel members for being here.

Thank you.

Question for Panel 1

To Hank Krakowski--FAA

Currently it takes a Pueblo radar controller nearly 2 years to certify at Pueblo. How long would it take for a Denver TRACON controller to certify on the Pueblo positions?

Question for Panel 2

To Mel Davis--Southern California TRACON:

You assumed Palm Springs approach control airspace recently, similar to what I am facing in my district with Pueblo. What can my local flying community expect when these services are transferred to Denver TRACON?