

OPENING STATEMENT OF REP. STEVE COHEN

Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Aviation

"Hearing on Air Traffic Control Facility Staffing"

June 11, 2008



I am pleased to be here today to receive testimony from the Air Traffic Organization Chief Operating Officer, the U.S. Department of Transportation Inspector General, the President of the National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA) and others today, as we examine air traffic control facility staffing issues.

During 2007, the nation's air traffic system carried 769 million passengers and 22.3 million tons of cargo. The flights that carried these passengers and cargo were controlled by Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) air traffic controllers.

NATCA has expressed several concerns about the on-going changes in the controller workforce. It notes that the number of CPCs in the workforce has fallen to a 15 year low and that retirement rates, even for personnel with time remaining before mandatory retirement, are unusually high. As of March 31, 2008, there were 11,164 Certified Professional Controllers (CPCs) working at FAA facilities, the lowest number in 16 years. I have also heard concerns from constituents over whistleblower protection rights.

The Department of Transportation Inspector General has conducted a review of the FAA's controller workforce, its hiring practices, training programs and future requirements and issued several recommendations to improve the air traffic controller workforce.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on what can be done to improve working conditions for our nation's air traffic controllers.