

Statement of the Honorable Frank A. LoBiondo
Aviation Subcommittee Hearing
March 22, 2007

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this important hearing today. I share your concern about safety of our aviation system. The continued outsourcing of maintenance work, new work rules on controllers and the failure to provide adequate security training to our flight crews are compromising the safety of air travel. Also of concern to me is the impact of the FAA's current impasse process for its bargaining units on workplace morale and ultimately safety.

As you know, the current process requires the FAA to submit to Congress its last offer when mediation fails. If Congress fails to act within 60 days, the FAA may impose its last offer on employees. As we have seen with the NATCA contract, this process enables the FAA to short circuit any real attempt at bargaining and mediation and allows the agency to impose its will when Congress fails to act. The result is low workplace morale and a high number of experienced employees leaving the agency. And I think we all understand the impact on safety when a large number of experienced controllers leave the agency.

In my district, AFGE Local 200 FAA employees who do the critical job of keeping our aging air traffic control system functioning are currently at impasse with the FAA on a contract that has been in negotiation since 1999. The FAA recently walked out of mediation and is expected to forward their last offer to Congress in the coming weeks. I am very concerned that as a result, the agency is going to lose these very experienced employees at a time when their vital competencies are critically needed. I have included with my statement Local 200's testimony and would encourage all members to review it closely.

I strongly believe that Congress needs to reform the current impasse system to ensure fairness for employees. Last year I sponsored legislation with Representative LaTourette that attracted over 270 members of the House, but unfortunately failed to reach the 2/3 necessary for passage. This legislation would have forced the FAA into real mediation and would have prohibited the agency from imposing its will on employees. I look forward to working with the Chairman to include this or similar legislation to reform the system in the FAA reauthorization or other appropriate legislative vehicle.