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Helicopter Association International Strongly Opposes President Trump's Air Traffic Control Privatization Plan

June 5, 2017 Alexandria, VA – Helicopter Association International (HAI) today joined other national organizations in opposing privatization of the nation's air traffic control (ATC) system.

These organizations signed a [joint letter](#) to President Donald Trump, expressing concerns that the plan would directly and significantly benefit the airline industry while destabilizing the current successful ATC system and raising costs through user fees that would be passed on to consumers.

“All stakeholders on both sides of this issue acknowledge that we already have the safest, most efficient air traffic control system in the world,” said Matt Zuccaro, president and CEO of HAI. “So what problem are they trying to solve?”

“This initiative appears to be an effort by the airlines for more control of the airspace and the airports,” continued Zuccaro. “As we all witness the airlines struggling with their own internal technology issues and related problems, does it really make sense to hand over control of the best ATC system in the world to them?”

Part of the administration's stated reason for pushing privatization is the FAA's delay in rolling out NextGen technology, its plan to update U.S. air traffic control. The helicopter industry has already embraced, implemented, and benefited from the initial phase of the new NextGen technology put in place by the FAA.

HAI respectfully disagrees with President Trump's description regarding the available technology within the current system. “The President's concern about flight delays being caused by the lack of system advancements is puzzling in light of the findings of Rep. Peter Defazio (D-Ore.), the ranking minority member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, who found that the airlines themselves cause approximately 60 percent of flight delays,” said Zuccaro.

“If the supporters of a private ATC are sincerely interested in improving ATC technology, let's privatize the technological development and implementation portion of ATC and keep the world's best-operating ATC system where it belongs, under the control and watchful eye of the Federal Aviation Administration and Congress,” said Zuccaro.

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ATC PLAN

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While the Trump administration says its ATC privatization plan will save the American public money, there is no clear explanation how that would happen or how much money will be saved.

The administration's plan would cancel the existing aviation taxes that currently fund ATC and transfer to a user fee system. What is left unsaid was what those user fees would be; the amount of funding required to set up, transition to, and support the private ATC entity; and the effect of user fees on flight activity and associated revenue. The economic viability of ATC privatization and its ultimate effect on the public and industry is unknown.

"The Administration wants you to think this issue is only about technology and safety that will benefit all stakeholders," said Zuccaro. "In my view, it's a move to give control of the air traffic control system to the airlines. I found it interesting that the President chose to surround himself with representatives of the airlines at his announcement, during which he failed to even mention general aviation.

"It seems obvious that a private ATC entity controlled by an oversight board with a majority of seats held by the airlines will support their own initiatives and interests to the detriment of general aviation and other affected parties," Zuccaro said.

Advancing the latest technology into the U.S. air traffic control system is a great idea that will benefit all parties and which HAI supports. Privatizing ATC and relinquishing control of the system to one stakeholder is not. This plan doesn't fix the NextGen issue; instead it destabilizes our current, world-class ATC system and passes on the cost to consumers.

HAI hopes that the current proposal will spark a meaningful conversation between all aviation stakeholders and the Trump administration and Congress. Let's work together to achieve our common goal of a National Airspace System that has technology that is second to none, equal access for all stakeholders, and a top priority of safety.

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HAI is the professional trade association for the civil helicopter industry. HAI's 1,500+ organizational members and 1,800 individual members safely operate more than 4,500 helicopters approximately 2.3 million flight hours each year in 73 nations. HAI is dedicated to the promotion of the helicopter as a safe, effective method of commerce and to the advancement of the international helicopter community.