

# CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

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## **Reps. Bishop, Israel Warn of Dangerous Staffing Shortage of Air Traffic Controllers Could Lead To Cancellations or Delays, Congestion, Higher Airfares, Safety Concerns**

Ronkonkoma, NY—Representatives Steve Israel and Tim Bishop held an event today at Islip MacArthur Airport to warn that air traffic controllers are facing a staffing shortage of crisis proportions in the coming years. The staffing shortage is of particular concern to the New York region where jobs are hard to fill because controllers can earn nearly as much in other locations, where the cost of living is lower and the work is less hectic.

"The time to act is now," warned Representative Israel, who organized the event. "Unless something is done, the increasing shortage of air traffic controllers will soon mean more congestion, more cancellations and delays, higher airfares, and will lead to numerous safety concerns."

"This issue is about far more than jobs, it is about the safety of our families when they board an aircraft and the trust that the public has in the security of our skies," Representative Tim Bishop said.

"Air traffic controllers are unseen and unsung heroes who keep us safe in the air and on the ground," noted Senator Charles Schumer, who issued a statement for the event. "They do great work under extreme conditions, and the only problem is we don't have enough of them. It's going to be a fight to get proper staffing levels in high-flight-volume and high-cost-of-living areas like New York, but the bottom line is we need more people as soon as possible."

Both the General Accounting Office and the Federal Aviation Administration have stated that the system is on the verge of a staffing crisis, with thousands of controllers eligible to retire in the coming years. The FAA anticipates that nearly half of the nation's 15,000 air-traffic controllers will voluntarily quit or be forced to leave at the mandatory retirement age of 56 by 2010. The retirements will come at a time when air traffic is expected to increase dramatically because of expanded flight schedules, new budget airlines, and growth in the private and charter plane industry. To stave off a crisis, at least a thousand controllers must be hired annually for the next three to five years.

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