

# Republicans Introduce Plan to ‘Remove 30K People from the Federal Government’s Payroll’

Eric Katz, GovExec.com | February 4, 2016

Republicans in Congress have introduced a plan to de-federalize air traffic control, which would move 30,000 federal employees into a non-profit corporation.

Proponents of the U.S. aviation overhaul say it would bring stability to a system that has been devastated by a partisan and volatile Congress. While the privatization of the Federal Aviation Administration has long been touted and debated, the renewed effort gained momentum after the union representing air traffic controllers signed on to the plan.

Rep. Bill Shuster, R-Pa., chairman House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, introduced the Aviation Innovation, Reform and Reauthorization (AIRR) Act on Wednesday, as part of the regular process of re-upping the agency’s power. The legislation would keep the FAA intact, but it would tasked solely with a safety regulatory mission. All air traffic responsibilities and employees would be moved to the corporation governed by a board of directors that would represent aviation system users.

Shuster promoted his bill for removing “30,000 people from the federal government’s payroll,” while arguing a more regular funding stream would allow for faster modernization and keep American aviation more competitive. The non-profit corporation would not make any budget requests and would receive no taxpayer dollars. It would instead operate on a “self-sustaining, cost-based user fee structure.”

That structure would break air traffic control “free from the bureaucratic inertia and funding uncertainty that have plagued the FAA for decades,” the congressman wrote in a description of the bill.

The National Air Traffic Controllers Association threw its support behind the bill, saying it was “in alignment with all of our organization’s policies, practices and principles.” NATCA has voiced its displeasure with the ebbs and flows of short-term funding bills, threatened and actual government shutdowns, threatened FAA-specific shutdowns and sequestration.

“The status quo of unstable, unpredictable funding for the National Airspace System has led to serious problems at the FAA,” NATCA President Paul Rinaldi [said](#) last year. “It cannot finance long-term projects, develop the system for new users or modernize our country’s aging infrastructure. The FAA has also struggled to maintain proper resources and staff at our busiest air traffic control facilities.”

Shuster echoed that sentiment in his outline of the proposed overhaul.

“Today’s budget uncertainty has contributed to significant cost increases and delayed delivery of ATC modernization programs,” he wrote. “Sequestration, employee furloughs, and government shutdowns have also had a devastating impact.”

Not all labor threw its support behind the reform measure. The American Federation of Government Employees; the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees;

and the Professional Aviation Safety Specialists all rejected the proposal, deriding what they referred to as a privatization effort.

“FAA employees are public servants who ensure the safety of the flying public,” the groups wrote in a collective statement. “A privatized model that functions without oversight could lead to self-serving agendas, taking control out of the public’s hands.”

The unions also called for a more stable funding stream, but said upending the entire system was unnecessary. Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., struck a similar tone, saying a non-profit corporation conducting air traffic responsibilities would not always have the best interest of the public in mind.

“The privatization plan will tear apart aviation programs, risk unnecessary duplication and complexity, and ultimately cost money for taxpayers and travelers,” DeFazio said. “It jeopardizes stable, predictable funding and risks new fees or taxes.”

NATCA and Shuster have avoided the term “privatization,” but the latter made clear this was not simply a government entity by another name.

“This is not a new form of federal bureaucracy or a government-sponsored enterprise,” Shuster said.

The chairman said his bill would reduce the red tape involved in approving new technologies that he argued “stifle innovation” and “undermine competitiveness.” His changes would help bring new products into the market more quickly, he said. The bill would also provide boosted training and development for the remaining FAA employees -- about 15,000 individuals -- and create new national standards and metrics to avoid regional discrepancies.

FAA is currently operating on a six-month stopgap authorization bill, set to expire in March. Congress last authorized the agency in 2012 after it had survived on 22 short-term extensions.

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(Highlights, footnotes and minor edits may have been added by aiREFORM)

# COMMENTS (as of 2/24 at 9:00am):

[Six-six-seven-two-four and one](#) · 1 week ago

Like explain how a senile, bumbling boob of a movie star became president man. You dig? This old fool did nothing but set us back broheimer. Sorry if you think he's some kind of modern-day hero. You're a clown bro. You like being a clown? Be honest.

0 Votes

[LibsRintolerant](#) · 1 week ago

Really? So, explain to us all how illegally striking was OK, bro...

-1 Votes

[SomeTruthOutThere](#) · 2 weeks ago

Then let's be thankful for checks & balances... even though these days it just means nothing (good or bad) gets accomplished.

0 Votes

[RJ](#) · 2 weeks ago

Form a more PERFECT UNION, one better than the ones our forefather came from...People have to stop thinking about themselves and put the nation an its people first...

0 Votes

[RJ](#) · 2 weeks ago

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America. All of these are things our forefathers established to ensure our existence, to include form a better world, place, than the ones we came from. Yet Republicans want to take our nation BACK TO A TIME that was in other nations. The Preamble speaks to us all in a way that we should all embrace each other to form a more perfect UNION, and not let someone hijack it and DIVIDE us so one class could rule another class...

0 Votes

[RJ](#) · 2 weeks ago

Evil and accurate. Its typical, for people here, to try and provide cover for another Republican idea to shrink the size of Government and WEAKEN the nation. Putting Federal employees into a non-profit corporation is just one more way to privatize a government entity. Bottom line is private corporations have their place, but it is NOT IN PROTECTING THE CITIZENS OF THIS NATION. That is a government function and it should not be OUTSOURCED. Not long ago the Republican congress wanted to PRIVATIZE the VA. Our nations VETS deserve better than some corporate bottom line. Republicans will do anything they can to ensure their KIDS NEVER EVER have to pay their fair share in taxes, to include WEAKEN a nation. They would truly turn this country back to slavery and not the slavery we know, but the slavery that says

those who have millions will RULE over those who don't...In other words RACE will not be a factor, FINANCES will determine your faith. So much for the AMERICAN DREAM...If you aren't born with it, so be it... Privatize Social Security, Privatize the IRS, privatize the VA, privatize the FDA, and now an attempt to Privatize the air traffic controllers...I am sure there is a plan to Privatize the Military...And all of these ideas are opposite of what the Constitution states the Government will do for the people of its nation... We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America. All of these are things our forefathers established to ensure our existence, to include form a better world, place, than the ones we came from. Yet Republicans want to take our nation BACK TO A TIME that was in other nations. The Preamble speaks to us all in a way that we should all embrace each other to form a more perfect UNION, and not let someone hijack it and DIVIDE us so one class could rule another class...

0 Votes

[Doublenickle](#) · 2 weeks ago

Agreed. Although if it wasn't for Dems in the Senate and a Dem President, the legislation as such might just go through-

0 Votes

[Six-six-seven-two-four and one](#) · 1 week ago

Keep stupiding up the Interwebs bro.

0 Votes

[flyboys](#) · 2 weeks ago

You and I are on the same side of this issue, though perhaps for different reasons. It is interesting to note that, "The National Air Traffic Controllers Association threw its support behind the bill..." I seriously doubt that NATC shares your fears, even though you may be correct in the end. In this instance, Republicans and labor are on the same page. I disagree wholeheartedly with privatization of ATC for many reasons I outlines in a separate comment. But labor seems to think that moving ATC off federal payroll and onto private payroll is a good thing. I disagree because I believe ATC is a critical piece of our national infrastructure and very much a function of the federal government. I do not want the airlines running our ATC and airspace any more than I want the trucking industry running our interstate system of highways. Besides, the feds (democrats and republicans) would merely find another way to spend the money rather than reduce taxes proportionally - so the cost to citizens would increase as a result of this move. There would be NO savings - exactly the opposite. And I don't believe the infrastructure would improve if subjected to a profit-based philosophy, heavily influenced by airlines - on that we are in agreement.

1 Votes

[SomeTruthOutThere](#) · 2 weeks ago

Happy to oblige, but you may find it surprising that you did the task yourself. When you posted that "*If* the Republican Congress *could* pass legislation cutting 30,00 [sic] employees from every

agency they *would* do it in a New York minute." If... would... could... so you agree that this unlikely to gain traction. The tone of your comment and the words you picked show that you are obviously aware that this will not happen, Thanks. This article is right up there with a headline of "President denies beating his wife". It did serve to fire you up with anti-Republican rhetoric, so it did serve the intended purpose. And before you fire back, remember that I attacked the article - not a political party or candidate (like you did). I have never changed my position that I despise both parties and reject the notion that politics in the USA is a binary choice: one or the other. Have a nice day and enjoy the big game.

0 Votes

[LibsRintolerant](#) · 2 weeks ago

"Reagan punted the ATC guys out on the street". Actually, they punted themselves out on the street by illegally walking off the job.

0 Votes

[Doublenickle](#) · 2 weeks ago

Thanks for standing up for a Fed!

0 Votes

[chainzaw](#) · 2 weeks ago

The only way you could disagree, is if you're flying first class. And if you are, you're no civil servant. In which case, you need to move over to the appropriate troll venue. Otherwise, if you can cite the source of that "20% of GNP" number, I'll be happy to disabuse you of your fantasies.

0 Votes

[oldfed](#) · 2 weeks ago

A common sense initiative that's long over due. Most industrialized countries already have privatized their ATC. Holding the workers accountable will eliminate the number of jobs added just to keep them awake

0 Votes

[Doublenickle](#) · 2 weeks ago

Quibbling about the semantics does not change the fact that 30,000 Federal employees will no longer be Federal employees. The point you are trying to make is valid- it's not like the earlier purge of ATC where the ATC boys were thrown out on the street by Reagan. These people should still have jobs. But you have to wonder how many of them will be kept around after the first couple of years and the system is made more "profitable".

0 Votes

[SomeTruthOutThere](#) · 2 weeks ago

Glad to know others understand and comprehend. Kudos to you, flyboys.

0 Votes

[flyboys](#) · 2 weeks ago

Congress has been trying to do this for decades. The intent to "privatize" air traffic controllers does not reduce cost. It merely shifts the cost burden to airlines and general aviation who will be forced to pay for the safety services via an ATC usage fee. Currently, the service is "free" to all air travel, including general aviation. If the FAA begins to charge for ATC service, many general aviation pilots will simply forego ATC interaction and fly to/from uncontrolled fields without filing flight plans. This is currently allowed under existing rules (VFR rules), but the free ATC service and added safety benefit of ATC make it easy and compelling for general aviation to use. Charging a small Cessna pilot for the service, the same as an airliner, would result in less usage - and perhaps less safe skies. Subsequently, the cost will be higher for airlines than anticipated because the number of users will drop significantly. As usual, the government will not reduce taxes to citizens based on the shifting of 30,000 employees off federal payroll. Instead, congress will simply spend money elsewhere while we watch our travel costs balloon. Of course the airlines will be passing those ATC fees on to the public in higher ticket prices. So, congress will reduce federal expenses without reducing spending, shifting those expenses on to the flying public without a commensurate reduction in taxes. In reality, this will be an additional tax on anyone who flies, with no equivalent reduction in the federal budget. So taxes stay the same and our transportation costs increase. Think of it this way - if the government stopped funding highways and bridges, states would put up toll booths on every interstate highway and bridge to charge anyone using them. Congress would not reduce taxes while we would pay tolls. Does that sound like a good deal for taxpayers? We end up paying more and congress has a windfall to spend on other projects for lobbyists. Before anyone says the users should pay for the services directly, consider this. Our infrastructure is one of the things that keeps us competitive and safe. It is a benefit to all of us, not just those who fly. It's like saying only those who drive should pay for roads and bridges and only those with children should pay for schools. Another argument against this legislation is the unintended consequences. If the airlines end up paying the lion's share of the ATC fee, they will control the service. The vibrant general aviation community will be second class citizens, subject to the whims of the airlines. It would be like putting the trucking companies in charge of the highway system, with car drivers having little or no voice. As I said, some in congress have been pushing this for decades. I think the airlines want it. They want to control the ATC services. They have failed for years. Let's hope that trend continues.

1 Votes

[Doublenickle](#) · 2 weeks ago

Congress has been trying to do this ever since Reagan punted the ATC guys out on the street. Then it took another ten years to actually fix the problems they were striking about; it wasn't just money.

0 Votes

[Six-six-seven-two-four and one](#) · 4 days ago

Tell Rick I said hello. You make a cute couple bro.

0 Votes

[Six-six-seven-two-four and one](#) · 1 week ago

I'm telling on you for swearing, bro.

0 Votes

[Six-six-seven-two-four and one](#) · 1 week ago

Bro, you marry Rick yet?

0 Votes

[Six-six-seven-two-four and one](#) · 1 week ago

Hey bro, how's your girlfriend Rick doing? You boys married yet man? I dig your style. Keep on stupidizing up the Interwebs. I dig it.

0 Votes

[chainzaw](#) · 2 weeks ago

How about if we truly privatize air travel ... eliminate the hundreds of billions of tax dollars dumped into this miserable cattle-car-in-the-sky system annually ... then let the beloved free market sort out the most cost-effective way to travel domestically. I'm betting that as in Europe and Asia, modernized rail travel would easily eclipse air travel. Even without the pittance of an average of \$1B annual subsidies over the past 44 years to Amtrak.

0 Votes

[tom wilson](#) · 2 weeks ago

A "miserable cattle car in the sky system", wow, you sure don't know what you're talking about. Before you post next time, think about what you're going to write. Probably close to 20% of GNP is directly tied to aviation. Ticket prices will sky rocket as a result. The "hundreds of billions" in savings will be spent elsewhere.

1 Votes

[What???](#) · 2 weeks ago

If I'm reading this correctly, a dysfunctional Congress can't provide steady funding so the answer is to privatize ATC. Why not take it a step further and privatize Congress? Taking the politicians out of the process is the ultimate step in reducing the size of the bureaucracy.

3 Votes

[will4567](#) · 2 weeks ago

Thanks for the clarification. However, they are not government employees working directly for a government agency. It would be the same here, where they would work for a public-private partnership. Like the Post Office.

1 Votes

[SomeTruthOutThere](#) · 2 weeks ago

"Yellow journalism, or the yellow press, is a type of journalism that presents little or no legitimate well-researched news and instead uses eye-catching headlines to sell more newspapers. Techniques may include exaggerations of news events, scandal-mongering, or sensationalism." In my opinion, this meets the criteria as defined above. The comment flyboys posted sums up why I consider this yellow journalism as well. The headline would have been

more accurate as "Republicans Introduce Plan to Make Air Traffic Controllers Contractors". Remember the sinking of the *USS Maine* in Cuba? Same thing. Hearst would be proud.

0 Votes

[psykomagician](#) · 2 weeks ago

Interesting point about "No Strike" clauses in bargaining agreements. The Controllers do gain the right to strike under the ATC Corporation model (which they do not have under federal law, as federal employees). But they could bargain it away. And Yes, long-term, the Corporate masters are going to look to cut costs (in order to increase management bonuses). The question is to what degree will such cuts be to working controllers (for example, overstaffed facilities) or to middle-management? But I think, overall, the proposal has exactly 0 chance of passing in the current Congress, in an election year. I just hope they get some form of reauthorization done.

0 Votes