

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 23, 2021

The Honorable Thomas Harker
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20350

Dear Acting Secretary Harker:

We write with regard to the North Field Air Traffic Control (ATC) tower at Naval Air Station (NAS) Whiting Field. As you know, NAS Whiting Field is the hub of all rotary wing aircraft training for the U.S. Navy and is one of the busiest military airports in the nation. Our Navy relies on the consistent output of trained rotary wing pilots from this installation. Because of the high operational tempo at which NAS Whiting Field operates, any interruptions in the training pipeline of Naval rotary wing pilots could have long term effects on our Navy.

In Fiscal Year 2019, Congress authorized and appropriated \$10 million in funds for a replacement ATC tower on the North Field. This project is required to replace the current tower, which is not suited to meet the rotary wing training requirements of the Navy. The ATC tower currently in use is far too small to meet the demands placed upon it. Naval air traffic controllers are working shoulder to shoulder in a tower that should be twice the size given the amount of staffing required. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated this situation. If one air traffic controller were to test positive for COVID-19, the entire tower's staff would be forced to quarantine. This could have a catastrophic impact on the output of rotary wing pilots for our Navy and for daily operations aboard NAS Whiting Field. Now is the time to solve this issue and move forward with constructing a larger tower which can safely accommodate its personnel.

It is our understanding the lack of progress on constructing the new North Field Tower is due to a cost overrun of \$7.5 million. We therefore request that this funding be included in this year's budget, or that the project be listed on an unfunded requirements list.

We look forward to solving this situation with you.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Matt Gaetz
Member of Congress