

Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024

The Honorable Michael Whitaker  
Administrator  
U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)  
800 Independence Ave., SW, Room 300 East  
Washington D.C., 20591

Dear Administrator Whitaker:

I write today to express my concern about the situation at Page Field—which is a business and general aviation airport in Southwest Florida. As the Member of Congress that represents Florida’s 19<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, it’s my duty to convey concern when such concern comes about. In this instance, the antiquated Air Traffic Control Tower (Tower) at Page Field is of great concern to several aviation companies, aircraft owners, aviation flight academies, and individuals that live in the Southwest Florida community.

For background, the Tower at Page Field has been subcontracted out by the FAA—even though, due to expanded aviation activities, such contractual action would not occur today. Simply put, the Tower’s infrastructure and technology are outdated, and the Tower needs to be modernized and rebuilt. Additionally, my office has heard of several instances of unprofessional Tower controller actions, and while there may be an argument that the Tower is underfunded, I believe the FAA should be concerned and brought into the conversation when safety risks present themselves. Though I understand that Tower controllers are often overwhelmed and overworked balancing several different operational roles, there is no excuse for unprofessionalism and inadequate communication.

I also find it insufficient that, oftentimes, the Tower only has one controller handling all Tower operations. Around the country, air traffic control towers are generally operated by three individuals—with each individual controller handling a single key function (e.g., clearance delivery, ground control, and local tower control). In my view, it’s never acceptable to task a *single* controller with managing these three crucial operational functions. In the alternative, I believe a minimum of two controllers should be handling Tower operations at all times—particularly during busy times of day and through the entirety of SWFL’s tourist season.

To proactively ensure the safety of my constituents in Southwest Florida, I also write today seeking transparency about the FAA’s ongoing decision process relating to the modernization of the Tower. Especially with the recent plane crash in Southwest Florida that took the lives of two individuals, and with the recent plane crash in Clearwater, Florida, I believe that federal funding should be prioritized and expeditiously deployed to modernize and rebuild the Tower—which in turn will enhance aviation activities at Page Field while simultaneously reducing potential safety risks to the SWFL community in the future.

Therefore, I respectfully request a response to the following questions:

1. When do you expect the Tower modernization process to begin, when do you expect the Tower’s modernization process to be complete, how much funding under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) will be allocated to modernize the Tower, and where does the Tower’s modernization effort stand on the FAA’s priority list for spending IIJA funding?
2. Can you please explain the oversight process associated with the FAA overseeing FAA subcontracted towers? In the event an FAA subcontracted tower consistently receives complaints relating to such tower’s lack of professionalism, what are potential ways the FAA can remedy the situation?
  - a. Can you also explain how the FAA incorporates the views of individuals, businesses, and relevant government authorities relating to the performance of FAA subcontracted towers?
3. Do you believe that inadequate air traffic control tower performance can increase the likelihood of aviation-related safety incidents—especially in a populated area such as Southwest Florida?
4. On Friday, February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Page Field was closed to aviation flight academies because of a NOTAM issued by the FAA for an event titled “Old Guys Fly In.” Can you please provide information relating to the issuance of the NOTAM, including whether FAA considered the impact of such NOTAM on aviation flight academies?

Thank you for taking my thoughts and concerns into consideration, and I look forward to receiving a response from you soon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'BD', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Byron Donalds  
Member of Congress (FL-19)

cc: Mr. Ben Siegel  
Executive Director and CEO, Lee County Port Authority