

# **Duckworth, Durbin Join Van Hollen, Inhofe & Colleagues in Bipartisan Push to Expand Aviation Workforce Training**

September 1 2020 6:14 PM



WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), a member of the U. S. Senate Aviation and Space Subcommittee and a former Army Black Hawk pilot, and Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) joined Senators Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Jim Inhofe (R-OK) and a bipartisan group of 28 of their colleagues in sending a letter to the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) urging them to fully implement two aviation workforce grant programs authorized in the 2018 FAA Reauthorization bill. The programs would invest in and expand the development of the next generation of aircraft pilots and maintenance technicians. As the Senators note in their letter, these innovative programs will help develop badly-needed workforce training in the aviation industry, helping the industry to partner with

local governments, schools, and labor groups to provide training. In turn, this training will help close the current skills gap preventing Americans from accessing these good-paying jobs and spur future economic activity.

“Given the broad, bipartisan support for the grant programs on Capitol Hill, and among schools, industry, and labor, we are disappointed that they are not yet operating. Understanding that establishing a workforce grant program is new to the Federal Aviation Administration, we urge you to initiate them before the end of the current fiscal year,” the Senators begin.

They go on to highlight the importance of these two programs, noting, “The grant program for pilot education will support the creation and delivery of curriculum designed to provide high school students with meaningful science, technology, engineering, math and aviation education. This program has the potential to grow our nation’s pilot workforce by encouraging our nation’s youth to become the next generation of commercial, general aviation, drone or military pilots. The grant program for aviation technicians will address the well-documented maintenance industry skills gap by encouraging and facilitating collaboration between schools, government, labor and industry to recruit and train the technical talent America’s aerospace sector will require to keep the nation’s aircraft operating safely and efficiently.”

The Senators stress that the pandemic and its recent economic impacts only heighten the need and urgency for these training programs. They close the letter pressing, “These important programs have been authorized for almost two years, and there is significant interest by stakeholders to establish them. With the end of fiscal year fast approaching, we strongly encourage you to get both grant programs up and running in the coming weeks.”

Senators Duckworth, Durbin, Van Hollen and Inhofe were joined in sending the letter by Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), John Boozman (R-AR), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Susan Collins (R-ME), Chris Coons (D-DE), Kevin Cramer (R-ND), Ted Cruz (R-TX), John Hoeven (R-ND), Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS), Angus King (I-ME), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Ed Markey (D-MA), Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), Jerry Moran (R-KS), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Marco Rubio (R-FL), Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ), Dan Sullivan (R-AR), John Thune (R-SD), Tom Udall (D-NM), and Ron Wyden (D-OR).

Earlier this year, Duckworth and Inhofe [introduced](#) S. 3360, a bill to establish the National Center for the Advancement of Aviation. In December 2019, Duckworth, Inhofe, U.S. Representative Cheri Bustos (D-IL-17) [introduced](#) the bipartisan, bicameral Promoting Aviation Regulations for Technical Training (PARTT) 147 Act of 2019 to improve education and training programs at aviation maintenance technician schools.

The full text of the letter can be found [here](#) and below:

Dear Secretary Chao and Administrator Dickson:

Section 625 of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-254) authorized two aviation workforce grant programs to facilitate the development of the next generation of aircraft pilots and maintenance technicians. Congress fully funded the programs for fiscal year (FY) 2020 in the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 (P.L. 116-94).

Given the broad, bipartisan support for the grant programs on Capitol Hill, and among schools, industry, and labor, we are disappointed that they are not yet operating. Understanding that establishing a workforce grant program is new to the Federal Aviation Administration, we urge you to initiate them before the end of the current fiscal year.

The grant program for pilot education will support the creation and delivery of curriculum designed to provide high school students with meaningful science, technology, engineering, math and aviation education. This program has the potential to grow our nation's pilot workforce by encouraging our nation's youth to become the next generation of commercial, general aviation, drone or military pilots.

The grant program for aviation technicians will address the well-documented maintenance industry skills gap by encouraging and facilitating collaboration between schools, government, labor and industry to recruit and train the technical talent America's aerospace sector will require to keep the nation's aircraft operating safely and efficiently.

The ongoing pandemic-related economic disruptions only heighten the urgency and need for these programs. Due in particular to the increased pace of aviation sector retirements in recent months, when industry business conditions return to pre-pandemic levels, the need for pilots and technicians will be more acute than before. By awarding grants now to encourage innovation in training and recruitment, the federal government can have a positive and lasting impact on the aviation workforce, as intended by Congress.

These important programs have been authorized for almost two years, and there is significant interest by stakeholders to establish them. With the end of fiscal year fast approaching, we strongly encourage you to get both grant programs up and running in the coming weeks.