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No reason to stall
By Reps. Sam Graves (R-Mo.) and Todd Rokita (R-Ind.)

A foundation of conservatism is our belief that the federal government is incapable of doing just about anything more efficiently or innovatively than the private sector. A perfect example is the Federal Aviation Administration’s (FAA) stalled effort to bring our nation’s aviation system into the modern era.

As commercially licensed, general aviation pilots with thousands of flight hours, we are uniquely positioned to understand the priorities and concerns of the general aviation community, and how FAA reform can improve our aviation system.

The Department of Transportation’s Inspector General has detailed to Congress the FAA’s failure to deliver on the promised benefits of NextGen; a GPS-based air traffic control system. The FAA has missed deadlines, exceeded budgets, and has almost entirely neglected industry stakeholders who will be using this new technology on a daily basis.The status quo is not working, and with each blunder by the FAA it becomes more apparent that the agency is simply not capable of implementing NextGen on its own. It’s time for a better approach.

After working extensively over the last 2 years and talking to each stakeholder group, we have learned what best practices to replicate and which to leave behind in regards to air traffic control reform. We continue to be intimately involved in discussions on transitioning air traffic control responsibilities from an ineffective federal bureaucracy to a user-funded, user-governed, not-for-profit organization, all in a manner that protects the small aircraft operators and private pilots who use the system.

We have stood front and center in the fight against per-flight user fees on general aviation. That position remains unchanged, and we would not even entertain this transition discussion if we found out it would harm the general aviation community. Ultimately, we want to ensure that these aviators reap the benefits of a modern, efficient air traffic control system.

It is true that our nation’s airspace is complex, and also that our general aviation presence is the largest in the world. But that does not preclude us from designing an Air Traffic Control Organization that is superior to any system in existence today. To say it cannot be done is to challenge the very fiber of American ingenuity. We must adopt our own way that meets the unique needs of our system and its users while continuing to operate the safest air traffic control system in the world.

Last year, we helped lead a group of 50 planes over the U.S. Capitol in honor of the 70thAnniversary of our Victory in Europe. Those planes symbolized more than America’s victory over fascism and imperialism in World War II. They celebrated a generation that knew it had to lead the world in ingenuity and innovation, because the freedom of tens of millions of people across the globe depended on it. Nowhere was that American exceptionalism and determination more evident than in the skies above oceans and battlefields.

The United States led the world in aviation in the 20th century, forever changing the course of human history. Remembering that proud tradition gives us the confidence and resolve to overcome the challenges ahead. To pursue these aggressive reforms would set America on a path to continuing its global leadership in aviation for the next century. To fail would be to fall behind and allow other nations to lead. The bottom line is this: the status quo is not working, and the opportunity to reform it is one we simply cannot lose.

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