

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

June 24, 2024

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

We write today to encourage the Department of Transportation to structure the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport slot selection process to prioritize enhanced air service connectivity for the whole country. In particular, we urge the Department to give particular consideration to markets that do not have nonstop service to either Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport or Washington Dulles International Airport to ensure we use this opportunity to improve connectivity.

We were proud to vote to pass the *Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act* to make our aviation system safer and stronger. This package included a number of provisions that aim to better connect our country, including hiring more air traffic controllers, improving infrastructure at airports of all sizes, and investing in research and development for innovative aviation technologies.

The legislation also included ten additional within and beyond perimeter slot exemptions to operate flights out of the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA), to better connect our country to the Washington, D.C. region. This provision requires that the Department consider the extent to which the new flight paths that are chosen “enhance options for nonstop travel to beyond-perimeter airports that do not have nonstop service from Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport.” In the process of selecting which destinations will be served by these new slots, we encourage the Department of Transportation to provide particular consideration to airports that also do not have nonstop service to and from Washington Dulles International Airport (IAD), the other airport that serves the Washington area under the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (MWAA).

The goal of expanding flights to Reagan is to better connect communities across the country to our nation’s capital. It is notable that while some airports have nonstop connections to IAD, DCA, or both, there are still a number of airports that have nonstop connections to neither. The Albuquerque International Sunport (ABQ) is the third largest unserved air service market to and from DCA based on number of passengers per day. Recent data suggests there is a high demand for travel between ABQ and DCA—with approximately 123 passengers daily, each way traveling between ABQ and DCA. Even more significantly, based on total daily demand

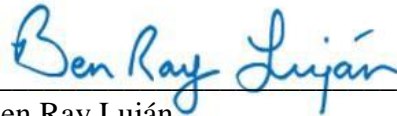
calculations for the Washington, D.C. region, ABQ is the largest market in the United States that does not have nonstop service to either DCA or IAD. This lack of direct connection cuts off significant economic opportunity and tourism for Albuquerque and the entire state of New Mexico. The Sunport is also the only major commercial hub airport in New Mexico, making it the only option in the state to directly connect to the capital region. The lack of direct connection not only affects our New Mexican constituents and businesses, but also the nation's national security mission and federal government operations - thousands of federal employees at National Labs and regional agency offices in New Mexico do not have straightforward access to our nation's capital via direct ABQ service to either IAD or DCA.

The goal of the *Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act* is to strengthen the U.S. aviation system—making it safer, more resilient, more innovative, more consumer-friendly, and better connected to every corner of our country. Opening up new flights at DCA is a unique opportunity to create new connections to parts of the country that currently remain disconnected. It is vital that the Department consider overall connectivity to Washington, D.C.—meaning not only DCA, but also IAD—in the decision-making process on which markets will be chosen for the new slot exemptions. We cannot let this opportunity to better connect our nation go to waste.

Sincerely,



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



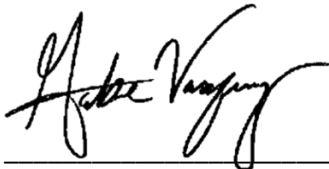
Ben Ray Luján
United States Senator



Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress



Teresa Leger Fernández
Member of Congress



Gabe Vasquez
Member of Congress