

Approved legislation would preserve Walla Walla airport control tower



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Published by Walla Walla Union Bulletin

- As of Thursday, October 4, 2018

Federal legislation approved by the Senate on Wednesday will preserve control-tower operations at the Walla Walla Regional Airport and save the Port of Walla Walla and airport about six figures a year.

The bipartisan legislation sponsored by U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., the top Democrat on the Senate aviation subcommittee, reauthorized the Federal Aviation Administration for five years.

The legislation fully funds contract air traffic-control towers, which includes Walla Walla's. For years, Walla Walla has had to pay a cost-share percentage to the federal government to continue offering tower operations. That amount is about \$90,000 to \$100,000.

The requirement prompted Port and airport officials to explore in recent years whether the airport and its commercial service should continue without a tower.

Port Commissioner Mike Fredrickson pointed out this morning some airports in the country, including in Salem, Ore., are fully funded by the FAA even with no commercial flights.

Under the legislation previously approved by the House and now the Senate, airports under the Cost Share Program that have at least 25,000 annual passenger boardings will be covered by the FAA.

“Now we have the pure benefit of it being federally funded,” Fredrickson said.

In addition to Walla Walla, other Washington airports in Spokane, Yakima, Tacoma Narrows, Olympia, Bellingham and Renton will receive full funding for their contract towers.

“Regional airports are a critical economic driver for communities throughout Washington state,” Cantwell said in a prepared statement. “From Walla Walla to Bellingham, ensuring these communities have thriving airports helps grow small businesses and create new jobs.”

The legislation has now been approved by both the House and Senate and moves forward for President Donald Trump to sign into law.

The provision was also included in language from Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., when the legislation was approved by the House in late September.

“The FAA Reauthorization Act is an important part of our infrastructure agenda. I am proud to have voted for this bill as it will modernize our aviation infrastructure and ensure airports are safer and more secure for the American people,” said McMorris Rodgers in a statement. “I made sure this bill included important priorities for the Spokane International Airport, and the Pullman-Moscow Regional Airport and the Walla Walla Regional Airport. Because of these provisions these airports in Eastern Washington will be better off now.”