

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SJM 8024

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As of February 2, 2000

**Brief Description:** Requesting the federal government to maintain current airport tower staffing.

**Sponsors:** Senators Gardner, Deccio, Haugen, Oke, Shin, Costa and Patterson.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Transportation: 2/2/2000.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

**Staff:** Gene Baxstrom (786-7303)

**Background:** The federal government is responsible for maintaining and operating airport control towers. Staff at these towers direct air traffic landing and taking off from the airport as well as aircraft operating in the vicinity of the tower.

Prior to 1981, all towers were staffed by Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) employees. In 1994, Congress provided funds for the FAA to convert Visual Flight Rule air control facilities to contract operation. By 1997, 160 contract towers were in operation, including towers at communities that never had an FAA operated tower.

There are concerns that contracting out of towers services results in lower staffing levels, lesser training for controllers, and reduced safety for airport operations. Others argue that the reduced costs which may be achieved with contracting out services permits adding controllers to airports which would otherwise not be staffed.

**Summary of Bill:** The federal government is requested to continue present policies for air traffic control and airport staffing, including adding new federal contract tower program services to airport not having tower services. The federal government is asked to not expand the federal contract tower program to airports now staffed by the Federal Aviation Administration.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.