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Take a fresh look at realities of Paine Field Allegiant Airline flights

John Koster, Snohomish County Councilman, District 1

It is plain to see that emotions run high about commercial air service at Paine Field. Let's all take a deep breath, step back from the heat of the issue for a moment, and take a sober look at the realities of the situation.

First, some facts: Paine Field was deeded to Snohomish County by the Federal government following WWII. The deed has conditions. One condition is that the county may not discriminate against passenger service.

If the reader will Google "FAA (airport) grant assurances," he will find: "22(a) Economic Nondiscrimination. It will make the airport available as an airport for public use on reasonable terms and without unjust discrimination to all types, kinds and classes of aeronautical activities, including commercial aeronautical activities offering services to the public at the airport."

This clause conditions both the deed itself and our federal airport grants that average millions of dollars per year.

When my four Democratic brothers on the county council adopted their "Hell no, we won't go" resolution they kicked a federal beehive. Soon the Federal Air Administration (FAA) sent the county a letter dated June 4, 2008, which I have placed on my website for the reader to peruse. There you will see the FAA reminded the county of its duty under Grant Assurances 22(a) and patiently advised the county of its obligation under federal law to "negotiate in good faith" with Allegiant Airlines "for the lease of parcels to conduct aeronautical activities."

The letter also states "the FAA does not view the Mediated Role Determination (MRD) as a prohibition on scheduled passenger service", and pointedly warns "failure to negotiate in good faith may subject the county to an enforcement action under FAR Part 16."

In other words, it ain't our football, and we can't take it home. If we want to play we have to share.

Of course, we could choose not to share. But there will be consequences. First, the feds will come take their football home, leaving us millions shy in annual federal grants. Secondly, we may jeopardize our long-standing agreement with Boeing to maintain and make necessary capital improvements to the airfield, gravely impacting Boeing and the thousands of jobs they provide.

Whether that portion of the county's population that lives within the vicinity of Paine Field can persuade the rest of Snohomish County to put their neck in that noose remains to be seen.

Ron Dotzauer's recent e-mail smear of Allegiant Airlines adds comic relief to the dialog. Dotzauer asks, "Who is trying to use Paine Field for commercial purposes?"

Hmm, well, that would be Boeing, ATS (formerly Goodrich), ATS Customer Airlines, Future of Flight, Castle & Cooke Aviation, Korry Electronics, Goodrich Landing Gear, Goodrich Aerostructures, Flying Heritage Collection, Museum of Flight Restoration Center, and Honeywell, to name a few. The full list goes on.

Dotzauer's humor is appreciated but it undercuts his clients' only ground of complaint, aircraft noise. His suggestion that we allow at the airport only those businesses that promise not to cut their losses in bad times is a dog that won't hunt. No one should take that idea seriously. By replacing noise as an issue Dotzauer leaves his clients twisting in the wind.

The County Council has no prerogative to choose sides in a swirling dogfight and play the game of "us against them." To the contrary, our duty is to prudently pursue the best interest of the county as a whole. We can, and should, save Paine Field from the FAA, save Allegiant from the opposition group, and save the opposition group from Dotzauer.

Come, let us reason together. Our choice is not between ruining the airport and ruining Mukilteo. That is a false dichotomy. We can simultaneously preserve our FAA benefits, reasonably accommodate Allegiant, and give consideration to the issue of aircraft noise.

Everett City Councilman Ron Gipson is correct when he says, "Commercial flight is going to happen regardless of what local government says."

But what local government says can have a great impact on the quality of the arrangement.

If local government simply says "Hell no!" then control passes to Allegiant and the FAA. If local government says "Let's talk" then noise, schedules, etc. may be on the table for discussion.

We should encourage County Executive Aaron Reardon to move forward with dispatch to engage in good faith negotiations between Allegiant and Snohomish County, to reach an understanding which advances the interests of the airport, Mukilteo, Allegiant, and Snohomish County as a whole.

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