

Duckworth Urges FAA, Pentagon To Reject Trump's Plan For Military Complex At Triumphal Arch

by Nick Johnson - Office of U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth
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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL)—Ranking Member of the U.S. Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Aviation—today urged Federal Aviation

Administrator Bryan Bedford and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to secure the safety of the D.C. airspace by rejecting President Donald Trump's plan to turn his "Triumphal Arch" project into a military installation that houses a large number of drones, snipers and ammunition. In her letter to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), Duckworth slammed the FAA and DoD for wasting precious time and energy on this pet project that will jeopardize aviation safety as they continue failing to implement the many urgent safety recommendations made by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) in the wake of the tragic DCA mid-air collision that claimed the lives of 67 people. This is the second time the Senator has [called on](#) the FAA to reject any pressure to rubberstamp President Donald Trump's latest taxpayer-funded vanity project, the so-called "Triumphal Arch," that could put the flying public at risk.

Duckworth wrote, "The Trump Administration's failure to faithfully and urgently implement NTSB's recommendations is compounded by FAA and DoD wasting finite time and attention to stroke President Trump's fragile ego by focusing efforts on approvals for the construction of his pathetic arch. It is a disservice to the flying public and dishonors the legacy of the lives tragically lost in the DCA midair collision."

The Senator also lambasted the FAA for allowing Trump to steamroll the agency's review process to expedite arch construction. She noted that the FAA's September 18 determination came two weeks after Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum announced that the Department of the Interior would begin breaking ground on the "Great Triumphal Arch and Military Observation Deck," and that the FAA's review failed to evaluate any military use of the arch, which is a critical deficiency now that Trump is crying national security in attempt to greenlight this unsafe, egotistical arch. Regarding the FAA's rushed aeronautical review, Duckworth wrote, "It contains zero analysis, let alone even a mention, of the Trump administration's plan to use of the arch as a 'Military Complex' functioning as a poorly secured armory to store ammunition, a military facility for drone operations and, in perhaps the most bizarre stated purpose, a lookout on U.S. soil for American military snipers to surveil the American people through the scope of a rifle. The FAA's incomplete aeronautical determination is grounds to pause the project and complete a new aeronautical study."

"Predictably, when DoD was asked about President Trump's plan to use his wasteful arch as a dangerous 'Military Complex,' the Pentagon stated it had no information beyond the President's early morning social media posts. And all of this occurs at a time when President Trump has failed, for months, to end his illegal Iran War that has killed at least 22 servicemembers and sunk the American economy. President Trump is using the military as a political shield for his unpopular vanity projects at home, and it is a shameful way to treat our troops," continued Duckworth.

Duckworth demanded answers from Bedford and Hegseth about the thoroughness of the FAA's review, questioning whether either the Administration has considered how turning the arch into a military installation will jeopardize the safety of the D.C. airspace, the flying public and pedestrians nearby.

“No Presidential pet project should receive greater urgency than protecting the people who fly through the National Capital Region every day. The American people cannot afford to stand witness to Trump's risky plan to place a 250-foot structure along a busy approach path, especially if he follows through on plans to station snipers on the arch and fly drones in this in the already congested airspace,” Duckworth concluded.

Full text of the letter can be found below and on [Senator Duckworth's website](#):

Dear Administrator Bedford and Secretary Hegseth:

I write to demand you secure the safety of the National Capital Region airspace and reject President Donald Trump's so-called Triumphal Arch project and President Trump's bizarre, unhinged early morning social media rants about his plan to convert the gaudy arch into a “top grade Military Complex,” housing large numbers of drones, snipers and ammunition.

Wasting time, energy and taxpayer dollars, on yet another Trump vanity project is particularly outrageous given the joint failure of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) to effectively implement corrective actions recommended by the independent National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) following the tragic January 29, 2025, midair collision near Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA); the deadliest aviation incident in the United States since 2001.

Failure to fully implement and exceed NTSB's recommendations to enhance the safety of the congested airspace near DCA endangers lives, including, as we learned on August 4, 2026, President Trump's, when commercial air traffic failed to pause during Marine One's departure from the White House. The Trump administration's failure to faithfully and urgently implement NTSB's recommendations is compounded by FAA and DoD wasting finite time and attention to stroke President Trump's fragile ego by focusing efforts on approvals for the construction of his pathetic arch. It is a disservice to the flying public and dishonors the legacy of the lives tragically lost in the DCA midair collision.

Aviation safety in the region remains demonstrably fragile. Nearly 20 months after the tragic collision between Flight 5342 and a Blackhawk helicopter that claimed 67 lives, the FAA and DoD have still not finalized a memorandum of understanding to govern shared operations in this highly constrained airspace. The absence of such an agreement,

more than 600 days since the deadly and preventable DCA midair collision, continues to elevate systemic risk and is simply unacceptable.

As is the infuriating reality that the majority of the 52 total safety recommendations NTSB issued following the deadly DCA midair collision remain open. Of the 35 total recommendations directed to the FAA, NTSB has only closed three and all 13 directed to the DoD remain open. On September 14, 2026, the NTSB said the FAA's responses to 11 of its recommendations were "unacceptable" because they failed to adequately address the identified safety concerns.

Addressing every safety risk identified by NTSB and exceeding its recommendations will ensure that all aircraft—civilian, commercial and military—operate under consistent and enforceable standards. All aircraft must play by the same rules. In July 2026, NTSB Chairwoman Jennifer Homendy warned that every day that passes without implementation of the recommendations represents a "continued and unacceptable risk to public safety."

As noted earlier, President Trump is the last person who should require such a stark and sobering reminder from NTSB. Last month, construction of another wasteful Trump pet project, his taxpayer-funded golden ballroom, contributed to radio failures that allowed Marine One to come within approximately 0.82 nautical miles laterally and 700 feet vertically of a passenger aircraft departing DCA. Unfortunately, it appears that this unsettling aviation safety incident has failed to deter President Trump from prioritizing his narcissistic quest to construct monuments, ballrooms and rename performing arts centers to honor himself.

Of course, President Trump is not solely disregarding the critical needs to improve aviation safety, he is also ignoring the American people who are struggling to afford gas, groceries, housing, airfare and everything in between. All because of a Trump affordability crisis triggered by President Trump's disastrous foreign war of choice against Iran, and President Trump's chaotic imposition of tariffs that raised prices across the board for American businesses and middle-class families.

How can the Trump administration justify another pet project under the guise of a "Military Complex" that would add to congested airspace in the National Capital Region while the FAA and DoD have not closed out the safety recommendations arising from the deadliest U.S. aviation disaster since 2001?

Beyond the joint failure of your two respective agencies to implement NTSB safety recommendations, DoD and FAA's record of communication lapses remains deeply troubling. In February 2026, FAA abruptly closed the airspace over El Paso, TX, and halted flights at El Paso International Airport after the Pentagon cleared the use of a

counterdrone laser without giving the FAA the data it needed to assess the risk to civilian aircraft. On March 13, 2026, I asked the Inspectors General of the Departments of Transportation, Defense and Homeland Security to investigate the interagency coordination problems.

Persistent shortcomings in interagency communication between DoD and the FAA create unacceptable safety vulnerabilities that could be further exposed if snipers and large numbers of drones were to operate in airspace where commercial aircraft fly. Any project that increases operational constraints must be subject to heightened scrutiny; not waved through because the President pretextually claimed it serves an unspecified “national security” purpose.

On September 3, 2026, Interior Secretary Doug Burgum announced that, “we are preparing to start, over the next two-week period, the excavation work necessary for the Great Triumphal Arch and Military Observation Deck.” Administrator Bedford, your agency did not issue its aeronautical determination until September 18, 2026. Despite your responsibility to ensure the safety of the National Airspace System, you appear to be powerless, or even complicit, in the Secretary of the Interior steamrolling the FAA and deciding to move forward with construction, with or without FAA’s aeronautical determination.

While I strongly oppose the U.S. Department of the Interior announcing plans to begin construction without the existence of an FAA aeronautical determination, the September 18, 2026, document fails to inspire confidence in the FAA’s analytical capabilities. It contains zero analysis, let alone even a mention, of the Trump administration’s plan to use the arch as a “Military Complex” functioning as a poorly secured armory to store ammunition, a military facility for drone operations and, in perhaps the most bizarre stated purpose, a lookout on U.S. soil for American military snipers to surveil the American people through the scope of a rifle. The FAA’s incomplete aeronautical determination is grounds to pause the project and complete a new aeronautical study.

I recognize that FAA’s failure to even address the use of the arch as a “Military Complex” is because even the Trump administration recognizes that President Trump’s claim is a transparent and absurd ploy to bypass necessary reviews, regulations and judicial oversight. President Trump is establishing a clear pattern of crying out “national security” whenever a court dare enforce the law, and his latest scheme is directly out of the playbook he used when his plans to waste taxpayer dollars on a massive ballroom, built on top of the historic East Wing he demolished, ran into trouble in the courts.

Predictably, when DoD was asked about President Trump’s plan to use his wasteful arch as a dangerous “Military Complex,” the Pentagon stated it had no information beyond the President’s early morning social media posts. And all of this occurs at a time when

President Trump has failed, for months, to end his illegal Iran War that has killed at least 22 servicemembers and sunk the American economy. President Trump is using the military as a political shield for his unpopular vanity projects at home, and it is a shameful way to treat our troops.

It is disturbing to see Federal officials devote enormous attention to an unnecessary, proposed structure while the NTSB and the public are still demanding action on recommendations intended to prevent another catastrophic collision in our skies. No Presidential pet project should receive greater urgency than protecting the people who fly through the National Capital Region every day. The American people cannot afford to stand witness to Trump's plan to place a 250-foot structure along a busy approach path, especially if he follows through on plans to station snipers on the arch and fly drones in this already congested airspace.

The FAA and DoD must reject this foolhardy plan and instead focus on increasing the safety of the airspace by meeting and exceeding all NTSB recommendations and improving interagency coordination. Accordingly, I request written responses to the following questions:

1. Administrator Bedford: Did the FAA's aeronautical study of the arch (No. 2026–AEA–8628–OE) evaluate any military use of the structure, including drone launch and recovery or armed personnel on the roof and plaza? If not, will the FAA reopen the study before its determination becomes final?
2. Administrator Bedford: Has the FAA received any request to authorize drone operations at or near Memorial Circle? If so, how would those operations be deconflicted from arrivals and departures at DCA?
3. Secretary Hegseth: Which military entity, if any, requested that the arch be converted into a "Military Complex," and what threat assessment supports that request?
4. Secretary Hegseth: Will you commit that no drones, snipers, munitions or other weapons systems will be stationed at the site until the FAA and DoD complete a joint safety risk assessment and share it with Congress?
5. Administrator Bedford and Secretary Hegseth: For each open NTSB recommendation arising from the January 29, 2025, collision, what is the status and the projected completion date for each recommendation?
6. Administrator Bedford and Secretary Hegseth: Have the FAA and each military service with aircraft operating in the National Capital Region signed an agreement to share aviation safety data and standardize operating procedures? If not, when will they?

Please provide accurate, honest and detailed written responses no later than October 5, 2026. For an administration led by a President who claimed to "have been the most

transparent president and administration in the history of our country by far,” it should be easy for FAA and DoD to provide straightforward answers to basic questions implicating the use of American taxpayer dollars and the safety of American lives.