

FIGHT TO RETAIN FUNDING

Esty on mission at Danbury Airport

By Dirk Perrefort

DANBURY — U.S. Rep. Elizabeth Esty stressed the importance of local airports and their impact on the surrounding economy Thursday during a visit to the Danbury Municipal Airport. She vowed to do what she can to keep local airports open.

Esty, who was recently appointed to a congressional subcommittee on aviation, said she hopes to keep the funding for the towers in place as budget talks loom on the horizon. The congresswoman visited the tower at Danbury Airport, she said, to gather information to use in the fight to retain the funding.

"It's foolish when we want to rebuild our economy to cut some of these core areas that spur economic growth," Esty said.

Earlier this year, officials with the Federal Aviation Administration threatened to close 149 towers, including the one located in Danbury, as a result of the federal sequestration.

While not always easily quantifiable, Michael Safranek, the airport's assistant administrator, stressed that the facility and others like it serve as economic engines for the region. A recent study completed at the Oxford Airport, which has less traffic than Danbury Airport, showed it helps to create tens of millions in economic activity for the surrounding area.

Safranek noted that Danbury is the second busiest airport in the state after Bradley. Danbury has more



Tyler Sizemore/Staff photographer

U.S. Rep. Elizabeth Esty tours the control tower at the Danbury Municipal Airport on Thursday. Esty visited the facilities to assess the funding of the control tower, which costs about \$600,000 per year to operate.

than 70,000 flights from the facility each year. Tower manager Dan May stressed the safety factor of keeping the towers open.

Safranek said that while planes will fly whether or not the tower is operating, the situation is much like an intersection with a broken traffic light.

"Cars are still going to use the intersection, but it would be a lot safer if the traffic light worked," he said.

May added that control towers like Danbury's, which are operated privately under a contract with the federal government rather than FAA-controlled tow-

ers, are far less expensive because of higher salaries and staffing requirements in the federally operated towers. May said the federal government could save as much as \$300 million annually if all towers in the country were privately operated.

Esty said she hopes to find bipartisan support to keep funding in place for contract towers.

"This is an issue that should receive bipartisan support," she said. "And I am looking for ways we can accomplish that."

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