

## [Sen. Udall visits with local aviation leaders](#)

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*New Mexico Sen. Tom Udall speaks during an aviation round table held Wednesday afternoon at the Roswell International Air Center to discuss its current status and future growth. (Mark Wilson Photo)*

U.S. Sen. Tom Udall met with Roswell aviation leaders at the Roswell International Air Center, Wednesday.

“It’s a real pleasure to have him and be able to facilitate businesses meeting directly with him,” Councilwoman Judy Stubbs said. Mayor Del Journey, Stubbs and RIAC Manager Jennifer Brady led the meeting, where community leaders and aviation experts voiced their concerns and needs, and issued many thanks to the senator for his work with RIAC.

The lingering theme of the meeting was job creation. Many leaders told stories of the growth of their new aviation businesses in Roswell, which have accounted for hundreds of new jobs in the community over the past few years.

According to the Economic Development Corporation, aviation is one of the most successful industries in the community and is part of the financial fulcrum of Roswell. Despite their good reports, leaders did not shy away from expressing their worries. Many voiced the need for more job creation and support for educational opportunities for Roswellians in the aviation industry.

“We’ve gone from 29 to 130 employees in seven months,” Jim Phillips, director of Roswell operations at AerSale said. “Our biggest problem is getting properly trained people.”

Brian Ernise, vice president of aeronautics at Calspan, voiced the concern for the Federal Aviation Administration to work closely with pilots and pilot trainers on emergency flight training and simulation machines. He expressed his frustration with the FAA’s inability to communicate with pilots to work on projects that help save lives. “As the training goes down ... we’re getting safer in some areas with technology, but ... the types of accidents that we’re having right now are preventable ones.”

Richard White, manager of Birdman Air Enterprises, echoed Ernise’s and Phillips’ concerns with training and recruiting staff to work in the aviation field. White works with aviation training interns from Eastern New Mexico University- Roswell’s aviation school.

“Right now, I have ... four students,” he said. “At one time, I used to have 57 students. For the job force out here, people want A&T’s.

They’re not going to be home-grown anymore. [We] have to go out and find them somewhere else, which takes away from [Roswell] ... where you want to keep the people.” Ironically, RIAC sits on the south side of Roswell, where many young people are exposed to gang activity, live in poverty and are in homes where their parents are without work.

Udall said that the key to helping kids in a high-risk situation, “is for them to have hope, and an opportunity to do something productive with their lives.” “Businesses plan for the job growth that they need,” Udall said.

“They look for the jobs that they need in the future, and then they work with the local universities, colleges and other training centers to open up opportunities for our young people. We need every single one of our young people. We can’t afford to have people go down a path of crime or gang [violence], or whatever it is.

“We need every one of them to be able to move forward economically. I’m trying to open up those opportunities, so that those young people can see a chance to lead a productive life ... and be a big part of the community.”

Along with job growth, RIAC is estimating that it will need \$7 to \$8 million to complete maintenance in various areas, according to Brady. Wednesday’s meeting concluded with warm remarks from Mayor Journey and a pledge from Udall to Roswell aviation experts that includes an open-door policy of communication.

“More than anything, I’d like to work with my staff and come up with a few things that we can push for ... and look at the big picture of where we want to go,” Udall said. “We’d like to continue to work with the city.”

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