

(September 20, 2007) Debate on FAA Reauthorization

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Floor Statement Submitted for the Congressional Record

Debate on H.R. 2881, the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2007

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I rise in strong support of this very important legislation reauthorizing the Federal Aviation Administration, and urge my colleagues to join me in voting for its passage.

I also rise to commend Chairman Oberstar and Ranking Member Mica on the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure as well as Chairman Costello and Ranking Member Petri of the Subcommittee on Aviation for their excellent leadership on this bill and for their continued dedicated service on transportation issues.

This bill contains a number of critical provisions that will improve our nation's transportation system. In particular, this legislation will go a long way towards modernizing and improving our nation's air traffic control capabilities by providing \$13 billion to accelerate the implementation of the Next Generation Air Transportation system. Through modernization and increased use of technology, this system will enable our air traffic control system to meet two to three times the amount of current demand, allowing us to keep pace with the ever-increasing number of flights. This technology will also allow us to more accurately track flights, preventing collisions in our increasingly congested skies. In addition, the FAA will be given the resources to make necessary improvements and replacements of facilities and equipment, ensuring the highest degree of air traffic support.

I would also like to thank the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the full Committee and Subcommittee for including report language on the potential application of Qualification Based Selection for Passenger Facility Charge funded airport projects. Qualification Based Selection is a process that works well with Airport Improvement Program funded projects and some other federally-funded transportation projects. It has been a process that has saved time and saved money in

other transportation projects. Consequently, taking a closer and more comprehensive look to see how it could be effectively implemented with PFC-funded projects seems to be a logical step.

This reauthorization also takes some important steps towards protecting flight crews and passengers. For example, OSHA requirements are finally extended to aircraft crewmembers under this bill, helping to ensure their on-the-job safety. This legislation also directs the FAA to conduct a study on pilot fatigue, and based on the findings of that study, update their regulations regarding flight time limitations and rest requirements for pilots. Furthermore, airlines and airports will be required to have contingency plans in place to take care of passengers affected by long delays, including providing food, water and medical care. This provision is a welcome relief to all of us who have ever experienced long and painful flight delays.

Furthermore, this reauthorization includes \$570 million to increase the number of aviation safety inspectors by more than one-third. These inspectors develop, administer, and enforce safety requirements for all aircraft being developed and flying today. Increasing the number of these inspectors will help ensure that our skies are as safe as possible.

I am also pleased that this reauthorization includes a number of provisions that will improve our environment. It directs the FAA to work to develop lower energy, emissions and noise engine and airframe technology. This type of technology will help to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels, improve our air quality, and combat climate change. This bill also contains measures to improve the environments of airport lands, including addressing water and air quality issues, and reduce aircraft idling time to reduce emissions and fuel consumption.

In addition to these environmental provisions, I would also like to thank Chairman Oberstar and Ranking Member Mica of the full Committee and Chairman Costello and Ranking Member Petri of the Aviation Subcommittee for working with me to include two provisions increasing R&D for environmental improvements related to aircraft fuel.

Currently, general aviation piston aircraft operate on 100 Octane leaded aviation gasoline, or avgas, which contains four times the amount of lead found in the already-banned leaded automotive fuel and is extremely toxic. Unfortunately, no economical alternative currently exists. Environmental and health concerns over this leaded gasoline will only continue to grow as use of these planes increases.

In order to address this issue, I worked to include in this bill a provision to continue and enhance R&D for alternative aviation fuels. This provision, which authorizes \$750,000 for fiscal years 2008 through 2010, will help to expedite the development, testing, and approval of an economical, unleaded alternative aircraft fuel.

Also included in this reauthorization is a provision I authored for a new FAA Center of Excellence focused on alternative jet fuel research. FAA Air Transportation Centers of Excellence provide research on important transportation issues through partnerships between the FAA, universities, industry and state and local government. In conducting transportation research, Centers of Excellence also prepare a new generation of trained professionals ready to meet our nation's transportation needs.

And in the coming years, perhaps no transportation need will be greater than the need for alternative energies. Increasing demand for fossil fuels and continued volatility in many energy supplying nations means that the price of fossil fuels will continue to go up. And, increased emissions from the use of fossil fuels further endanger our global environment.

Jet fuel in particular illustrates the dangers of our current reliance on fossil fuels. Many airlines in this country, already fighting bankruptcy, are particularly vulnerable to higher fuel prices and increased volatility in the energy market. And while jet emissions still constitute only 3% of global emissions, that share is growing rapidly as the number of flights worldwide continues to increase.

Consequently, it is apparent that developing alternative jet fuels is imperative for our nation's airlines and our environment. Recognizing this need, and witnessing the valuable R&D that FAA Centers of Excellence have provided in other areas such as Airliner Cabin Environment, Noise and Emissions, and Airport Technology, I authored a provision included in this reauthorization which will create a FAA Center of Excellence dedicated to alternative jet fuel research. This Center of Excellence's research will improve the long term health of our domestic aviation economy and our global environment.

The benefits of this Center of Excellence and all the improvements in safety, efficiency, labor protections and environment provided by this reauthorization are particularly important to my hometown of Chicago. Chicago is the transportation hub of the nation and transportation is - metaphorically and literally - what keeps our region moving. Chicago Midway Airport, which is in my District, and nearby O'Hare International Airport are two of the busiest and largest airports in the nation. And while thousands of people pass through these airports every day, they are the local airports for my constituents and the surrounding communities. Consequently, any national improvements in our aviation system will be acutely felt by those of us who live under the busy skies of northeastern Illinois. I believe this reauthorization is a good beginning in improving not only the flying experience of my constituents, but also in reducing the amount of aviation emissions and noise that they encounter on a daily basis.

And importantly for my District, this FAA reauthorization provides necessary funding to make our runways safer. This issue is important to the many people in Chicagoland who still clearly remember the tragic accident in 2005 when an aircraft skidded off the runway at Midway Airport and into a passing car, killing a young boy. To address some of the concerns raised these types of accidents, this legislation provides \$42 million over four years for runway incursion reduction programs and \$74 million over four years for runway status light acquisition and installation. These runway improvements will not only help to protect flight crews and aircraft passengers, but also the people such as those in my district who live and work alongside our nation's airports.

In conclusion, this FAA reauthorization contains important efficiency, safety and environmental provisions that will benefit the nation and Chicagoland in particular, and I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting its passage.