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House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure **DEMOCRATS**

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Oberstar Introduces Commercial Space Flight Safety Legislation **Seeks to overcome 'Tombstone Mentality'**

WASHINGTON—The safety of passengers in future commercial space flight ventures is the driving force behind legislation introduced late Tuesday by Rep. James L. Oberstar (Minn.), Ranking Democratic Member on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

The bill (HR 656) enhances the role of the Federal Aviation Administration in addressing safety issues for the fledgling commercial space flight industry.

Oberstar said he supports the development and growth of the emerging technology that will one day lead to private companies providing flights into outer space, but not at the expense of passenger safety. Oberstar said current law prevents the Secretary of Transportation from setting even minimal passenger safety standards for space launch licenses for the next eight years, unless there is a potentially catastrophic event.

"The current statutory language amounts to, in essence, the codification of what has come to be known in aviation safety parlance as the 'Tombstone Mentality,'" Oberstar said. "For years, both I and many of my colleagues on the Aviation Subcommittee have criticized the FAA for waiting until after a disaster to take safety actions, and have urged more proactive safety oversight."

The bill would require that FAA include, in each license it issues, minimum standards to protect the health and safety of crews and space flight participants. However, it would also require that FAA take into account the "inherently risky nature of human space flight."

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Oberstar chaired the House Aviation Subcommittee from 1989 through 1994 and gained a reputation as a champion of aviation safety. He said reasonable safety regulations on commercial space flights would not prevent technological advances in that industry any more than federal safety regulations throughout the 20th Century prevented advances in commercial aviation.

“Although FAA has closely regulated aircraft manufacturing since the 1920’s, this regulation has not prevented major technological progress, including the development of jet aircraft in the 1950’s and all-composite general aviation aircraft in recent years,” Oberstar said.

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