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House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure DEMOCRATS

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Attn: Transportation, Aviation

House Aviation Subc. Adopts 7 of 9 Democratic Amendments, Reports Aviation Stabilization Bill

***Oberstar pledges to continue to fight for worker relief, bag
matching, security assessments to airlines***

WASHINGTON—The House Aviation Subcommittee today marked up HR 5506, the Aviation Industry Stabilization and Reform Act of 2002, approving seven Democratic amendments and rejecting two.

The subcommittee turned back an amendment by Rep. James L. Oberstar (Minn.), Ranking Democratic Member of the full Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, that would have required positive passenger bag matching to be done at connecting airports. Currently, the Transportation Security Administration only requires bag matching at points of origination. Oberstar said tests conducted by the TSA show bag matching can be done at connecting hubs with little disruption to the flow of air traffic.

“This is the Achilles Heel of our airline security system,” Oberstar said. “A terrorist can sneak a bomb on board a plane in his checked luggage, get off the plane at a connecting airport, and the bomb stays on board. That’s what happened to Pan Am 103 when it blew up over Lockerbie, Scotland in 1988.” Oberstar was a member of the President’s Commission on Aviation and Terrorism that investigated the Lockerbie bombing.

The amendment was opposed by the Republican leadership of the subcommittee and rejected by voice vote.

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October 2, 2002

The committee rejected by a vote of 22-18, mostly along party lines, another Oberstar amendment that would assess the airlines \$750 million a year as their share of the cost of maintaining security at airports. The amendment would allow airlines to offset some this payment with costs incurred for certain security services they still provide.

Prior to the attacks of September 11 last year, airlines were responsible for passenger screening and other security measures. The Aviation and Transportation Security Act of 2001 turned those responsibilities over to the new federal Transportation Security Administration. The Act also required the airlines to pay the government an amount equivalent to what they had been spending on security, but did not specify an amount. Oberstar said the \$750 million figure in his amendment is based on what the airlines themselves said they were paying a year ago.

"Last year the airlines sat right here in this room and testified that they were spending \$750 million a year on security," Oberstar said. "I want to hold them to their own words."

Oberstar pledged to continue to fight for the rejected measures when the bill reaches the floor of the House. He said he also wants the bill to provide relief to the airline workers who were displaced by the events of September 11.

"Last year, when we passed legislation to help the airlines overcome the financial trauma of September 11, the bill did not include relief for the 150,000 workers who lost jobs in the wake of the terrorist attacks," Oberstar said. Speaker Hastert assured us that relief would come in separate legislation, but it never came. Now, a year later, we have another chance to act to help these people. We cannot let this opportunity pass. It's time to hold the Speaker to his promise."

HR 5506 extends war risk insurance for airlines through the end of 2003. It also extends the application period for the loan guarantee program created a year ago to help mitigate the financial impact of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the airline industry. The bill makes changes in the organizational structure of the Federal Aviation Administration's Management Advisory Council and the Air Traffic Services Board, and makes technical corrections to last year's Aviation and Transportation Security Act.

At today's mark-up session, the subcommittee approved two amendments by Rep. Shelley Berkley (Nev.). One expresses the sense of Congress that the loan guarantee program should give greater weight to the need to preserve competition through the survival of smaller airlines. The second amendment calls upon the Secretary of Transportation to convene a conference to examine the air transportation industry and recommend changes to better address passenger needs following last year's terrorist attacks.

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October 2, 2002

The subcommittee accepted an amendment by Rep. Ellen Tauscher (Calif.) requiring the Transportation Security Administration to prepare a report to Congress identifying security threats to our nation's airports, outlining mandated security measures, and making recommendations for security improvements.

An amendment by Rep. Juanita Millender-McDonald (Calif.), calling for a study of bomb-proof baggage containers for use on aircraft, was also adopted by voice vote.

The subcommittee did adopt three amendments offered by Oberstar. The amendments 1) call upon the President to make every effort to mitigate the impact on airlines caused by a disruption in fuel supplies should America go to war with Iraq; 2) reopen the airline stabilization loan guarantee program to provide up to \$3 billion to help air carriers deal with rising fuel costs in the event of a war; and 3) direct the Transportation Security Administration to convene a working group on air cargo security to recommend ways to expand the current "known shipper" program.

The bill was reported out of subcommittee by voice vote.

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