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COMMITTEE ON
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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4605

JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE

April 28, 2008

Senator Jay Rockefeller
Chairman
Senate Commerce Committee Subcommittee
on Aviation Operations, Safety and Security
Washington DC 20510

Dear Chairman Rockefeller:

This week, the Senate will meet to consider the "Aviation Investment and Modernization Act of 2007" (S. 1300), legislation reauthorizing the Federal Aviation Administration. I am troubled by provisions in the bill as well as several potential amendments that will harm Reagan National and Dulles International Airports and want to share with you my thoughts these important issues.

The system in place at Reagan National Airport that governs the statutorily created slots, maintains an important air traffic balance between the airports and has been managed to facilitate access by new entrants in the marketplace. The legislation reported by the Committee includes 20 additional slots: 12 beyond the statutorily imposed perimeter and 8 within. Recently, I have been made aware of possible amendments that add more slots and alter the use of certain existing slots.

As you know, the physical constraints at Reagan National Airport are such that adding a significant number of new slots will result in the deterioration of service at the airport, as parking, gates, ticket counters and baggage facilities are already heavily stressed. Placing additional burdens on these facilities will cause these well run airports to experience unnecessary operational problems for the benefit of a few. Moreover, increasing the number of slots, adding more passengers, cars and aircraft noise puts additional burdens on the surrounding community. I am concerned that these proposed changes will have on the quality of life in the communities surrounding Reagan National Airport.


In addition, statutorily permitting only those slot holders who provide service to large hubs to serve destinations beyond the perimeter of their choosing abandons the commitment Congress made with the Northern Virginia community to shift long haul flights to Dulles. This amounts to a special interest earmark for a select group of carriers, as the pool of beneficiaries is identifiable and limited. Should a carrier desire to fly beyond the perimeter, the underlying bill makes 12 new slots available for which an application can be made. By allowing existing rules to be altered further for a select class, Congress will be allocating this scarce resource for the convenience of a few rather than community need – a result that should be avoided.

I have the utmost respect for you and the Commerce Committee; however, I do not support Section 414 of S. 1300 and plan to offer an amendment on the floor to remove this provision. In

addition, I will work to prevent additional changes beyond the existing provision included in the Committee's reported bill and hope that you will similarly work to reject any additional attempts to alter the High Density or Perimeter rules at Reagan National airport.

Thank you for your leadership on S. 1300 and your partnership on the issues outlined herein. Please do not hesitate to call should you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Jim Webb
United States Senate

JW/tdb