

February 17, 2011 – Movement on FAA Reauthorization

The Senate is preparing to pass FAA bill; House Committee approves its own bill

The Senate is poised to pass the FAA reauthorization bill (S. 223) as early as this evening (or as late as tomorrow afternoon) after invoking cloture on the bill this afternoon by a vote of 92 to 2. The lopsided cloture vote was made possible by a last-minute compromise on the contentious issue of additional long-distance flights from Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. This was essentially an intramural Democratic dispute, with Democratic Senators from the West Coast fighting the Democratic Senators from Virginia.

The compromise amendment would add 24 new slots (each slot is a takeoff or landing operation, so 24 slots equals 12 daily round-trips) with an option for eight more slots after the FAA completes a study of the issue.

Under Senate rules, the Senate must vote on final passage of the bill no later than 30 hours after cloture vote, which would be about 8:30 p.m. Friday night. But in light of the lopsided nature of the vote, the pressure is on to deal with the final remaining amendments, yield back all debate time, and pass the bill this evening so Senators can leave town for the recess. Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK) is demanding separate votes on as many as five of his amendments, which is the biggest delay at the moment.

In the House, the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee approved its own FAA reauthorization bill (H.R. 658) yesterday by a 34 to 25 roll call vote. Republicans defeated several contentious labor-related amendments during the markup including:

- a Costello (D-IL) amendment to strike section 903 of the bill (which would overturn the National Mediation Board's new system of counting votes of company workers for unionization purposes) by a vote of 29 yeas, 30 nays;
- a Hirono (D-HI) amendment requiring the FAA and OSHA to hurry up and complete their Memorandum of Understanding on work conditions for flight attendants by a vote of 28 yeas 31 nays;
- a Hirono (D-HI) amendment requiring the FAA to develop a rule for dealing with flight attendant fatigue, by a vote of 29 yeas, 30 nays;
- a Michaud (D-ME) amendment requiring the FAA to inspect all foreign repair stations twice a year, by a vote of 27 yeas, 32 nays; and
- a Lipinski (D-IL) amendment to require the FAA to require drug and alcohol testing for the employees of foreign repair stations, by a vote of 25 yeas to 34 nays.