

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 28, 2003

Dear Democratic Colleague:

We strongly urge you to send a member of your staff to a briefing on the Conference Report on the Aviation Reauthorization bill, H.R. 2115. The briefing will be on September 3 at 9:30 A.M. in Room 2167 Rayburn HOB. The Conference Report is likely to be brought to the House Floor early in September. None of the House or Senate Democratic Conferees signed the report, objecting to the process that was used, and to several special-interest provisions that jeopardize aviation safety and security, and the competitive positions of United States airlines.

The House and Senate bills that were taken to Conference had bipartisan support. In the Conference process, the Republicans decided to abandon bipartisanship. Shortly before the August recess, the Republicans determined that they would unilaterally decide a number of controversial issues that were before the Conference, including proposals that were not in either bill. There was a hastily summoned meeting of the Conferees for which the agenda was limited to opening statements. The Democrats were permitted to make a substantive proposal on only one issue, after which the Conference was adjourned. The Republicans then unilaterally drafted a report and had Republican Conferees sign it. There was never a vote of the Conferees approving any portion of the Conference Report, much less an opportunity for Democrats to offer their own proposals.

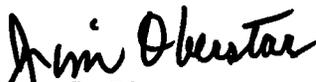
The Report that came out of this sham process contains several provisions that jeopardize aviation safety and security, and that are strongly objected to by transportation workers and their unions, as well as the national AFL-CIO.

- Despite strong House and Senate votes supporting a provision banning privatization of the FAA's air traffic control system, the bill authorizes FAA to contract with private industry to operate control towers at 69 airports, which includes the 8th busiest tower in the country, and six other towers in the busiest 50. Significantly, the Alaska delegation protected towers in their State, two of which were on the original list, against privatization.
- The bill undermines a cornerstone of our aviation policy, by allowing foreign airlines to carry cargo between cities in Alaska and other cities in the United States. Since the beginning of commercial aviation, the United States and most other countries have reserved aviation traffic within their borders for the home country airline. This policy has been undertaken for reasons of national security as well as competition policy.
- The Conference Report includes a provision making discretionary the mandatory requirements in the Homeland Security Act of 2002 that TSA issue security and anti-terrorism training guidelines for our nation's flight attendants. Surely, with the continuing heightened security alert in the airline industry, we should not endorse a potential rollback in terrorism training for flight crews.

These issues will be explained in greater detail in the briefing, along with any available information on Republican strategy. The briefing will be conducted by Democratic staff of the Leadership and the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, and by representatives of the Transportation Trades Department of the AFL-CIO.

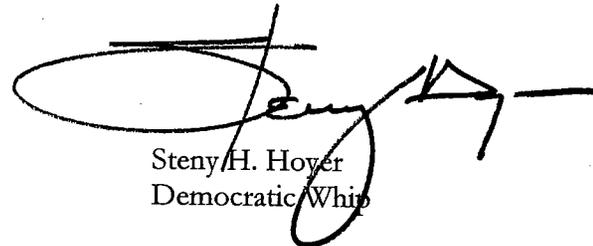
If you have any questions, please call Jim Oberstar, or have your staff call the Committee's Staff Director, David Heymsfeld, at Ext. 54472.

Sincerely,


James L. Oberstar
Ranking Democratic Member
Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure


Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader


Peter A. DeFazio
Ranking Democratic Member
Subcommittee on Aviation


Steny H. Hoyer
Democratic Whip