

Congressman John Barrow

Before

U.S. House of Representatives

Subcommittee on Aviation,
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

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STATEMENT OF JOHN BARROW

Mr. Chairman, it's an honor to appear before the Subcommittee to discuss my concerns regarding the FAA Reauthorization Bill, specifically the FAA's proposed funding mechanisms.

I represent Savannah, Georgia – home to the Savannah International Airport and Gulfstream Aerospace Corporation. That means that this bill is especially important to a lot of folks I represent.

Gulfstream employs more than 5,000 people at their Savannah facility. Their annual payroll at this facility is \$360M, and in the district alone they spend another \$80M yearly with suppliers in support of their vendor operations. As a result, the impact of the FAA Reauthorization Bill on my district is huge.

I strongly endorse the necessity to modernize our air traffic control system. However, the President's proposal fails to address the critical need for a comprehensive plan for modernization.

I urge the subcommittee to insist that the FAA present a modernization plan, including timetables, milestones, and its estimated cost, before they initiate a debate on funding.

As with many of my colleagues here today, I don't agree with Administration's attempt to link user fees to modernization of the Nation's air traffic control system. The system needs to be modernized no matter how we pay for it. And we can modernize it using the existing tax and oversight structure. But we need to organize a comprehensive plan first.

The Administration proposes to dismantle the current funding mechanism and tax structure that have built the safest, most efficient air traffic control system in the world.

In contrast to the current system of aviation excise taxes set by Congress, user fees would be set annually by the FAA without Congressional approval.

Given the monopoly power of the FAA as the sole provider of air traffic services in the U.S., and given the FAA's poor track record of fielding new technology to modernize the air traffic control system, we can't afford to put all of our eggs in one FAA basket.

Giving the FAA the right to set user fees is a blank check and it would totally remove congressional oversight from the funding and governance of our nation's air traffic control system. Now that we're trying to expand oversight is not time I give it all away.

User fees would require that the FAA establish an "IRS" organization to administer a system which would be much more inefficient than the current system.

In addition to user fees, that proposal raises general aviation fuel taxes by over 200 percent. This is nearly a 50 cent per gallon increase in fuel taxes, and will have a huge adverse impact on the general aviation industry just as it's recovering from the economic downturn caused by the last recession and 9/11.

I think that there are areas where the FAA should be independent of Congress. For example, I strongly support the FAA's independence in the area of safety oversight of designees and certificated organizations, such

as repair stations and manufacturing facilities.

But safety oversight is an inherently governmental function, and should not be paid for on a pay-for-service basis.

If we're going to protect safety oversight as an inherently governmental function, we should reject user fees for the certification of new aviation products and technologies as the way to pay for it.

The Administration's proposal also threatens innovation. It opens the door for certification

user fees that would impede the introduction of new and safer equipment into the aviation system. This could harm the competitiveness of U.S. manufacturers in the global market.

I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee today to talk about this important issue. I also want to thank Chairman Costello and Ranking Member Petri for their commitment to aviation and for moving this important legislation as quickly as possible. I know that, working together, we can craft a bill that will modernize our nation's air traffic control system while protecting the oversight role of Congress over this national asset.