U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Washington, DC 20515

James L. Oberstar
Chairman

David Heymsfeld, Chief of Staff
Ward W. McCarragher, Chief Counsel

John L. Mica
Ranking Republican Member

James W. Coon II, Republican Chief of Staff

August 15, 2008

The Honorable Robert Michael Gates
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Mr. James May
President & Chief Executive Officer
Air Transport Association
1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Suite 1100
Washington, D.C. 20004-1707

Dear Secretary Gates and Mr. May:

We write regarding the recent news reports of military service members on official orders being charged baggage fees by airlines. We believe better coordination on the part of our airlines and the U.S. Department of Defense is needed so that costs are not borne by individual service members on official travel.

While the carrier involved in the recent news account has subsequently changed its policy, we believe airlines should not be charging our service members that are traveling on official orders additional fees for extra baggage. Further, if our airlines wish to seek compensation for extra baggage for service members traveling on official orders, our airlines and the Department of Defense should develop a better arrangement for collection of those fees so that individual service members are not forced to pay any fees upfront and then seek subsequent reimbursement.

The current arrangement of filing reimbursement paperwork to recoup costs associated with excess baggage is an undue burden on our servicemen and women who are bravely entering or leaving a combat zone and this should be changed immediately.

Again, our troops defend our nation each and every day and deserve our respect and gratitude for a job well done, not fees and paperwork.

We urge you to work with each other immediately to ensure that military service members on official orders are not charged baggage fees by airlines, and we offer our assistance in facilitating any such meetings or discussions.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to a timely response.

Sincerely,

James L. Oberstar, M.C.
Chairman

Jerry F. Costello, M.C.
Chairman
Subcommittee on Aviation