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DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

**COMMITTEE ON  
TRANSPORTATION AND  
INFRASTRUCTURE**

SUBCOMMITTEES:

CHAIRWOMAN  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,  
PUBLIC BUILDINGS, AND EMERGENCY  
MANAGEMENT  
AVIATION  
WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT



**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
Washington, D.C. 20515

**COMMITTEE ON  
OVERSIGHT AND  
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SUBCOMMITTEES:  
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\* COVERS DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA ISSUES

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HOMELAND SECURITY**

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TRANSPORTATION SECURITY, AND  
INVESTMENT PROTECTION  
EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION,  
PREPAREDNESS, AND RESPONSE

**Statement for the Record for H. Res 508: Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives**

**that the general aviation industry should be recognized for its contributions to the United States.**

Ms. Norton. Madam Speaker:

H. Res. 508 recognizes the contributions of general aviation and encourages general aviation activities. General aviation is a little recognized, major sector of the airline industry, which contributes \$150 billion to United States direct and indirect economic output. I also want to mention the Transportation Security Administration Reauthorization Act of 2009, which included an important section setting up a general aviation working group within the Aviation Security Advisory Committee, to advise the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) on security issues in general aviation. This advisory group was established after the TSA began rulemaking on the Large Aircraft Security Program that threatened to swallow general aviation amidst burdensome and unnecessary regulations, suited for large commercial aircraft. Longstanding unattended issues and insufficient attention to the nation's important General Aviation sector are finally getting the attention they deserve. Along with other members of the House Committee on Homeland Security, I intend to see that General Aviation security issues are treated uniquely for the sector they administer.

However, as most members who have sat in on any hearing with the FAA, TSA, DHS or any other security agency may now know, the District of Columbia's main airport, the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA), is uniquely hampered by impossibly restrictive regulations that have destroyed general aviation in the nation's capitol, and arbitrary practices may be spreading to others. In the Homeland Security Committee, we have taken the important first steps to give detailed attention to this major section of the airline industry to the new administration.

After 9/11 the restrictions on General Aviation in the nation's capitol, in particular, became symbolic of arbitrary action against general aviation that could happen anywhere. Even though New York City was the epicenter of 9/11, the nation's capitol is the only location that suffers under unique restrictions that have crippled general aviation here. In fact, there was no

general aviation for four years. After joining in my complaints at hearings, the former Chairman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Don Young, threatened to subpoena any agency that did not comply with a bill that aimed to compel the resumption of general aviation flights at DCA and to hold them in contempt if they refused to appear before the committee to report on progress. As a result, a plan finally was put in place with requirements, but the DCA Access Standard Security Program (DASSP) was almost worse than no plan at all. Before 9/11, general aviation activity at DCA accounted for 1/3 (approximately 30,000) of the total annual operations at DCA. In contrast, in October 2005 when program DASSP began, operations averaged about one flight per week. Today, activity averages about three to four flights per day, about 1000 a year. The requirements in the DASSP include:

- \* General aviation operators must adopt a security program, background checks on flight crews, identify a security coordinator, and train on security procedures
- \* All DASSP flights must carry an armed security officer (ASO) on board (very few such accredited officers are available.)
- \* Flights must depart from one of 27 TSA approved DASSP gateway airports. Full departure screening of crew, passengers, baggage, and aircraft by TSA security inspectors
- \* Flights must request permission to operate in DCA no sooner than 72 hours in advance of the flight (due to DCA slot requirements) and no later than 24 hours in advance of the flight (for TSA security reviews) for each flight into DCA.
- \* These same screening procedures must be used for flights departing DCA
- \* Charges approximately \$230 are assessed to cover TSA's screening costs plus \$15/passenger for screening names against the No-Fly and Selectee lists

Requirements for an Armed Security Officer and use of a gateway airport are predictably, and we think, deliberately impossible for most operators to meet. TSA has approximately 200 registered operators in the DASSP, making the wait for an ASO intolerable.

However, the Department of Homeland Security has determined "that general aviation presents only limited and mostly hypothetical threats to security... (and) that the steps general aviation airport owners and managers have taken to enhance security are positive and effective." DHS goes further in its report on general aviation:

\* "The current status of [general aviation] operations does not present a serious homeland security vulnerability requiring TSA to increase regulatory oversight of the industry."

\* "Although [TSA's Office of Intelligence] has identified potential threats, it has concluded that most [general aviation] aircraft are too light to inflict significant damage, and has not identified specific imminent threats from general aviation"

Nevertheless, the nation's capitol has been singled out as the only jurisdiction under particularly onerous, unnecessary and wasteful program restrictions. As the initial approach of TSA to general aviation in general showed, however, the entire general aviation sector was about to be buried by the Large Aircraft Security Program, until our committee said "NO!" The thoughtless creep mission of the TSA into General Aviation, and the total failure to weigh actual security risks against the implications of draconian security measures, was stopped by our Committee on Homeland Security. The District of Columbia general aviation community deserves the same respect and attention.

General aviation at DCA is not the only industry in the District of Columbia that has been wiped out by arbitrary and restrictive airspace regulations. The South Capitol Street Heliport is a commercial heliport that once served east coast cities such as New York, Miami and Boston. It continues to serve the Metropolitan Police Air Support Unit and the U.S. Park Police. The Heliport is also the point of evacuation for the Supreme Court and part of the Department of Defense Nightingale program. In fact, on 9/11 this heliport actually became the Air Control Command Tower when DCA was evacuated. Moreover, having shown it was a vital asset, not a liability, for two years after 9/11, under an agreement with the Secret Service – an agreement that was later adopted by the TSA to develop its Civil Aviation Security Rules - the South Capitol Heliport continued to receive corporate commercial clients and news gathering helicopters. Yet, without explanation, beginning in October 2003, commercial operators have been altogether restricted from using the heliport, despite the fact that the heliport owners have been clear that they are willing to comply with any and all security demands.

The nation's capitol has all but lost helicopter service, even for the vital security purposes our heliport has performed. Without corporate commercial clients the South Capitol Heliport cannot generate enough revenue to survive. The owner has submitted the highest level security plans, but the TSA and the Department of Homeland Security have failed to respond. At my request, the Committee on Homeland Security has added heliports specifically to the list of entities on the general aviation working group. This heliport is vital for both security and commercial helicopter operations that the District of Columbia cannot afford to lose. While we pause to recognize the importance of general aviation to the U.S. economy, I use this occasion to remind my colleagues in the Congress and the Administration to recognize the importance of general aviation to the nation's capitol.