

LARSON COSPONSORS BIPARTISAN PASSENGER RIGHTS BILL

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WASHINGTON, D.C.—U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) announced today that he is an original cosponsor of the Airline Passenger Bill of Rights Act, which was introduced this afternoon in the House of Representatives. The legislation was authored by U.S. Rep. John Dingell (D-MI) and U.S. Rep. John Sweeney (R-NY) who combined their own similar previously introduced bills into this new bipartisan air passenger rights legislation. Larson is also a co-sponsor of Rep. Dingell's original legislation, H.R. 907, which is similar to the bill introduced today.

"I had the opportunity a few weeks ago to hear the actual experiences that a number of people in my District had with air travel, and based on their testimony and the letters and faxes my offices have received, action needs to be taken on behalf of passengers," said Larson. "In some instances, passengers were denied essential needs and services by airline staff members. I am proud to be able to co-sponsor this legislation, which institutes necessary rights for air passengers, and curbs anti-competitive practices that hurt the consumer."

Passenger Rights Provisions:

- Requires air carriers to provide everyone, including travel agents, with access to all fares.
- Requires that consumers be informed about chronically delayed flights.
- Permits consumers to use any portion of their ticket.
- Mandates that air carriers provide a ticket agent with written notice and full statement of reasons, on or before the 90th day preceding termination, and at least 60 days to correct any deficiency claimed within the written notice.
- Provides consumers access to state consumer laws to resolve disputes with airlines.
- Requires air carriers to have food, water, restroom facilities, and the ability to deplane in the event of a weather or other emergency for all passengers.
- Permits passengers to deplane if the plane is sitting on the ground for more than one hour after the scheduled takeoff time, the plane has not been cleared to takeoff in the next 30 minutes, and crew members are allowed to deplane.
- Requires air carriers to accurately notify consumers of known delays, cancellations and diversions as early as possible. Prohibits false explanations.
- Increases compensation to be provided to passengers who are involuntarily bumped. Additionally, air carriers must provide alternate transportation to the passenger's final destination along with immediate and reasonable compensation for food and hotel costs.
- Requires the Secretary to issue a statement outlining the rights of airline passengers and the publication of such rights on placards on airplanes and with the passengers' tickets, if practicable.

Competition Provisions:

- Requires the Department of Transportation (DOT) to consider the extent to which an air carrier has engaged in any

unfair or deceptive practice, or unfair method of competition prior to issuing it additional international flights.

- Prohibits dominant carriers from restricting their code share partners from entering into code share agreements with other airlines.
- Increases, from \$1,000 to \$10,000, the penalty for unfair methods of competition.
- Requires the transfer of slots to be approved by the Secretary of Transportation (Secretary). The Secretary must consider the competitive effects of the transfer when deciding whether to grant its approval.
- Requires the Secretary to conduct a study of joint venture agreements to determine whether they constitute an unfair or deceptive practice, or unfair method of competition.
- Mandates a DOT study of hub airports to determine whether the dominant air carriers are charging excessive fares, acting in unfair or deceptive ways, or using unfair methods of competition. If it is determined that dominant air carriers are acting in such ways, the Secretary may order the reduction of fares, rebates to passengers who were over charged, the transfer of gates, slots and other facilities to competitors, or any other action necessary to remedy the situation.
- Requires a GAO study of how ORBITZ will effect competition regarding the purchase of airline tickets by consumers.
- Requires a General Accounting Office study on the current and evolving federal policies toward slots, particularly at congested airports.
- Requires the Secretary to conduct a study of scheduling practices in order to report to Congress on ways to improve scheduling in order to reduce delays.
- Requires a DOT review of gates and facilities to determine if the gates are being fully utilized, and if not, gives the Secretary the authority to make gates, facilities and other assets available to competitors on terms that are fair and reasonable to improve airport competition.

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