

of our constituents, as we know, from time to time based upon a headline that grips all of us. We all benefit from safe and effective air transport.

I have a letter from Chairman Saltmarsh of the Massachusetts Aeronautics Commission and I think a line from this letter succinctly summarizes this debate.

If the aviation excise taxes are not reinstated quickly, the FAA fiscal crisis could result in a degradation of air transportation safety.

We should heed this message and enact the reinstatement of the aviation ticket taxes. The extension through the end of this fiscal year serves all of our constituents well, and I currently serve on a task force which is reviewing all of these excise tax proposals.

I urge my colleagues today to let common sense prevail. It is our responsibility to reinstate these aviation taxes. These taxes are of necessary purpose and provide a purpose and service which benefits all of us.

I also think it is interesting that a year ago we were in the midst of a stalemate in this institution over how much authority the Secretary of the Treasury ought to have. Today the suggestion is being made in one quarter that we ought to refrain from action on this aviation tax proposal, and instead turn the authority for this issue over to the Treasury Secretary so that he might assemble a solution. That is not the role of the executive branch in this instance.

Mr. HILLEARY. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Texas [Mr. PAUL].

(Mr. PAUL asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PAUL. Mr. Speaker, if I could be convinced that this piece of legislation was truly the honoring of a user fee, I believe I could give it some support. I believe user fees and trust funds may be a way to go in many of the areas of our system that overtaxes and overspends. But I have come to the conclusion that this so-called reinstatement is a tax increase. Not only would I not be satisfied with even maintaining a tax, I would like to see taxes go down. The fact that there will be \$2.7 billion more extracted from the American taxpayers, I feel compelled to oppose this piece of legislation.

But at the same time, I would like to put in a good word for the trust funds. Truly, if we would follow our commitment to the trust funds and not use these trust funds for spending in the general revenues, I think we would all be better off. Whether it is the Social Security trust fund or whether it is the highway trust fund or the airport trust fund or the port trust fund, I think it would be much better if they were true user fees, and since I conclude that this is not a true user fee and it is an actual increase of taxes going into the general revenues, I feel compelled to oppose this piece of legislation.

I urge my colleagues to vote no on H.R. 668.

Mr. ARCHER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from Tennessee [Mr. DUNCAN].

Mr. DUNCAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the reinstatement of the 10 percent ticket tax. I want to commend the gentleman from Texas [Mr. ARCHER] for his leadership on this issue. Chairman Archer is chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means, has never supported an increase in taxes, and neither have I.

We have the safest and most efficient aviation system in the world, but it is growing by leaps and bounds due to great increases in both air passenger and air cargo traffic. We simply cannot operate a safe, efficient, rapidly growing system for free. We have to spend money on it, and this means either some type of tax or some type of user fee or some combination of both.

Speaker GINGRICH has asked the Subcommittee on Aviation, which I chair, to look into a user fee system. We have already held 2 days of hearings on this and have heard from many outstanding witnesses, but we are still a long way from reaching any type of consensus on this. In the meantime while we consider user fees or other types of taxes, we need to reinstate the 10 percent ticket tax.

Aviation is one of the few major fields in which the United States still leads the world, but we need to support Chairman ARCHER and take this very necessary step today to make sure that we maintain a safe and efficient aviation system.

I urge my colleagues to support the gentleman from Texas [Mr. ARCHER] and the Committee on Ways and Means and reinstate this tax. This is not a tax increase and we need to take this step at this time.

Mr. HILLEARY. Mr. Speaker, how much time is remaining on my side?

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SOLUMON). The gentleman from Tennessee has 12 minutes remaining, the gentleman from Texas has 3 minutes remaining, and the gentleman from New York has 4 minutes remaining. So the gentleman from Tennessee has substantial time ahead of them.

Mr. HILLEARY. Mr. Speaker, would the gentleman from New York wish to speak again on this before we wind up?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Does the gentleman from Tennessee have no further speakers at this point?

Mr. HILLEARY. I have no further speakers other than myself.

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, I will leave it up to you how we handle this. I have one more speaker and I assume we want to end it all together, so if the gentleman intends to use all of his time, I think it is important to know that.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Texas has the right to close, and the gentleman from Tennessee has the right to speak just before the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. RANGEL. I only have one more speaker.

Mr. HILLEARY. I will be speaking and I will be consuming the rest of my time and then yielding back.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Does the gentleman from Texas have no further speakers except himself to close?

Mr. Archer. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time other than my closing speech.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In that case, the Chair will recognize the gentleman from New York to close for his side.

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, I have one speaker. I did want to make some closing comments.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Minnesota [Mr. OBERSTAR], who is the ranking senior member on the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

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Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I thank our Democratic leader on the committee for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, to characterize this bill as a tax increase is a disservice to truth, to history, and to aviation. The truth simply is that this bill represents the reinstatement of a fee. It is called a tax, but it has been treated as a fee, a fee that was the unintended victim of the budgetary train wreck that we engaged in at the end of 1995 and the beginning of 1996. Nobody intended that this fee, that these funds should lapse. It is only fair, it is only fair to air travelers that we reinstate this fee and these funds into the Aviation Trust Fund.

The history that we would be disserving is that in 1970 air travelers of this country, through the Congress, agreed to impose a fee to be deposited in a trust fund like the Highway Trust Fund for the purposes of aviation, to serve the needs of a growing sector of our economy, which sector today represents \$600 billion, 10 percent of our gross domestic product in the United States.

To allow this fee to lapse and the funding that goes into the Aviation Trust Fund to lapse would be a disservice to aviation. It would mean that there would be no money for airport construction unless we are prepared to appropriate funds out of the general revenues, which, in effect, would be a real tax increase on the rest of the American economy. There would be no funds for airport improvement projects, runways, taxiways, overlays, parking aprons on the side of airports.

There would be no funds to continue the modernization of the air traffic control system, the \$32 billion modernization program which we get a monthly report on the status; 87 to 90 percent of a \$32 billion program is already in place and we are making progress toward finishing the job by the end of this decade; and air traffic controllers would not be paid.

All of us in this body who travel on weekends would find our travel schedules grinding to a halt unless we are