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Condemns FAA Inaction On His Calls For Tighter Airspace Restrictions Over New York Metropolitan Area; Shutdown Of Indigo Airlines; & Reduction of Aircraft Noise

Washington, DC - Continuing his relentless fight for tighter airspace restrictions over the New York City metropolitan area, the shutdown of Indigo Airlines, and new aircraft noise restrictions, Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ9) yesterday grilled Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Administrator Marion Blakey over her agency's inaction on the matters. At yesterday's hearing of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, of which he is a member, Rothman passionately expressed his dissatisfaction with the FAA and called for an immediate explanation for the agency's lack of action.

"The FAA bureaucracy reflects a culture that caters too much to airline operators, while disregarding the concerns of those who live near airports or underneath flight paths," Rothman said of the case he made to Blakey. "It is unacceptable that New York City has not been given the same protections from general aviation aircraft that Washington, DC has received. While these general aviation aircraft by themselves, because of their size, may not seem to be able to inflict a great deal of damage even if they were to be diverted into a building, if they were filled with chemical or biological agents, they could potentially cause a tragedy greater than the one we had on September 11."

The restrictions Rothman is calling for would mirror those already in place for Washington, DC and would prohibit general aviation aircraft from flying within 15 miles of New York City, including those planes that operate at Teterboro Airport. The ban would last as long as the war with Iraq, or longer if the ban continued in Washington, DC. Planes can apply for exemptions, and if granted, those planes would have to undergo rigorous TSA safety inspections before landing or taking off at Teterboro or any other airport within 15 miles of New York City.

Rothman also pressed Blakey for an explanation as to why the FAA has refused to shut down Indigo Airlines - a company that offers four daily, scheduled service flights between Teterboro Airport and Midway Airport in Chicago. Rothman has called on the FAA to uphold the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey's (PA) longtime ban on scheduled service, while also calling on the TSA to stop Indigo's service because of security concerns. Indigo offers tickets to random customers over the phone and Internet, and because it operates under the guise of a "charter" aircraft, its passengers are not subject to the rigorous security checks mandated by Congress at all major airports in the United States. Blakey acknowledged that the FAA is still reviewing the matter.

"It is a major error on the part of both the leadership of the FAA and TSA to allow Indigo to continue its operations when Indigo doesn't undergo the security of a major airport, and is not subject to a permanent TSA presence to screen passengers and luggage," Rothman said. "Indigo even brags to its potential customers about how you'll be out of your car and onto the plane without the so-called 'security hassles' of a commercial airline. Also, Indigo threatens to radically alter the nature of Teterboro Airport. Allowing Indigo to continue its operations would turn an already busy general aviation reliever airport into another Newark, JFK, or LaGuardia - just with slightly smaller planes! Teterboro could see a flood of copycat airlines from all over the United States bringing their scheduled service planes to Teterboro and destroying the quality of life for Northern New Jersey residents."

Rothman closed his comments by demanding that the TSA, the Bush Administration, and the U.S. Department of Transportation protect the people of the New York metropolitan area from general aviation aircraft and from Indigo Airlines' circumventing of the rules at Teterboro Airport.

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