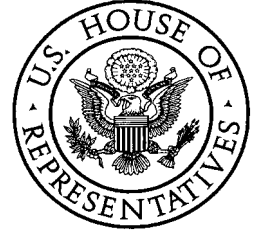




NEWS RELEASE

Congressman Joe Wilson



Representing the 2nd District of South Carolina

For Immediate Release

*Contact: Wesley M. Denton
Communications Director
(202) 225-2452*

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Senate Leadership putting American airline passengers at risk

Since September 11th, we are now all aware that there are evil people intent on killing innocent American civilians. And the vast majority of our nation is in agreement on one method to prevent these tragedies from ever happening again: arm pilots.

Seldom is there such consensus on a single issue as there is with arming commercial pilots to defend against terrorism. Polls have shown that 79% of the public and 80% percent of pilots favor the legislation. Nearly every pilot and flight attendant association supports the measure. Newspaper editorial boards all over the country including the *Washington Times* and *Charleston Post and Courier* have written in favor of arming pilots.

Indeed, even in the closely divided Congress, a bipartisan bill to arm all pilots, which I co-sponsored, passed the House of Representatives overwhelmingly with over two-thirds of members voting in favor by 310-113. Transportation Chairman Don Young (R-AK) and Aviation Chairman John Mica (R-FL) introduced the bill, H.R. 4635, the "Arming Pilots Against Terrorism Act."

However, even with the great majority of Americans asking for pilots to be armed, two Democratic Senators are trying to stop this common-sense proposal, Majority Leader Tom Daschle and South Carolina Senator Fritz Hollings. As a result, 103 Republican and Democratic House members have signed a letter to these Senators requesting consideration of this issue.

Daschle has refused to take up the very popular House bill that passed weeks ago, and Hollings has blocked Senate legislation similar to that of the House from making its way through the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, which he chairs. Senators Bob Smith (R-NH), Strom Thurmond (R-SC), and Zell Miller (D-GA) are sponsors of this bill, S. 2554, the "Arming Pilots Against Terrorism and Cabin Defense Act of 2002."

For months, Hollings has turned a deaf ear to the American public and refused to hold even one hearing on arming pilots. In May, when female pilots advised Hollings that the cockpit door would have to be opened for restroom breaks, Hollings derisively said they could use potted plants inside the locked cockpit instead. But with pressure mounting due to the popularity of the issue, Hollings finally allowed very limited consideration of this proposal during a hearing last Thursday. This was neither a full nor fair hearing, as Hollings rudely denied many of the proponents of the legislation the opportunity to testify.

One of those that Hollings refused to hear was Mrs. Ellen Saracini, whom I met on July 18 during a press conference with other U.S. Congressmen and Senators, where she joined us in urging the Senate to pass a bill to arm pilots. This is a personal issue for Ellen because her late husband Vic was flying the hijacked plane that crashed into the second World Trade Center tower. Vic, like more than half of commercial pilots, was a former military pilot, having served in the U.S. Navy.

“My husband discussed the arming of pilots with me and he believed strongly that it was a valid way of ensuring aircraft safety. Little did he know how profoundly his thoughts would impact his life,” said Mrs. Saracini in a passionate and compelling speech at the news conference.

Despite the pleas of Americans like Mrs. Saracini, there are some that argue for other security measures to be taken. These include reinforcing doors and hiring more Air Marshals. I agree that these are steps that must be taken, but neither will offer full protection. We are still many months, perhaps years away, from installing secure doors in all of our airplanes, and according to U.S. Senator Conrad Burns (R-MT), we would need an Air Marshal program the size of the Marine Corps to sufficiently protect all airline passengers.

The bill to arm pilots is just one of more than 50 that are languishing in the Senate. The Republican House leadership has passed several bills the American people demanded, including the bill to arm pilots, a welfare reform bill, a bill providing Medicare prescription drug benefits, and a ban on partial birth abortions. Yet, the Senate Democratic leaders refuse to act on these bills.

Senators Hollings and Daschle should stop obstructing the passage of important legislation and instead work with Republicans in a bipartisan fashion to protect the American people from terrorists who seek to destroy our way of life.