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PILOTS URGE NEW LOOK AT AVIATION POLICY, SECURITY FUNDING

WASHINGTON – Doubling the tax on America’s airlines to pay for security measures, as proposed in President Bush’s federal budget, undermines an industry strapped by economic forces outside of its control and illustrates the need for a new look at U.S. aviation transportation policy, the Coalition of Airline Pilots Associations says.

In a letter to the chairs and ranking members of the budget and commerce committees in the House and the Senate, CAPA President Jon Safley urged that Congress “hold off on levying any new taxes on this struggling industry until the nation is secure in the knowledge that our vital aviation transportation needs can be met.”

“The security of air travel is a national priority and a vital component of homeland defense,” Safley wrote. “The cost of this security is a crucial aspect of the war on terror, and we believe should be spread among the entire public, since we all benefit from the protection it provides.”

The new federal budget calls for steep increases in airline contributions to security costs, imposing \$1.5 billion in new taxes at a time when many carriers are still scrambling to recover from the disastrous effects of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, which sent the industry into a tailspin.

Airlines already bear the brunt of aviation security expenses, with government taxes, fees and surcharges now comprising about 25 percent of a typical domestic traveler’s ticket price, and in some cases, up to 44 percent. This steep toll places the taxation of air travel on par with so-called “vice” purchases like alcohol and tobacco.

Safley warned that the doubling of the security tax “will further destabilize the industry and may well push struggling airlines over the brink. The effects of such a disaster would be felt far and wide, in communities throughout the nation. We believe it is essential to quickly pinpoint the problems and to develop a policy that ensures that it survives – indeed, that it thrives and helps all our communities prosper.”

The Coalition of Airline Pilots Associations is a trade association that represents the pilots who fly for American Airlines, UPS, ABX Air, Southwest, and AirTran. CAPA's mission is to address security and safety issues that affect their membership.