

Office of the White House Press Secretary

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THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

I am signing today a bill, H.R. 9771, which authorizes funds over a five-year period for the extension of the Airport Development Aid Program and for the continuation of Federal programs pertaining to the operation and improvement of the Nation's airway system. This bill, although falling short of my recommendations in several respects, will provide the basis for a number of important improvements in the operation of the airport and airway system.

First, the long-term extension of funding authorizations, while more than this Administration recommended, is funded from user taxes and will permit us to achieve substantial progress in the development of our Nation's public airports. In addition to supporting projects which will provide greater efficiency and safety in the operation of aircraft at these airports, the bill will permit the application of Federal assistance to projects which will enhance the ability of airport terminals to provide a smooth flow of traffic.

Second, the bill permits for the first time in nearly five years the use of monies in the Airport and Airway Trust Fund for defraying expenses incurred by the Department of Transportation in maintaining air navigation facilities, although it unwisely makes the amount of funds available for maintenance dependent on the amount of funds obligated for airport development purposes. This provision is most important from the standpoint of equity to the general taxpayer and I am especially pleased that the Congress agreed to its inclusion in the bill. I continue to believe that the users of the airport and airway system who derive special benefits from the system should contribute a fair share to the payment of system costs.

Third, the bill will permit us to make important progress in our efforts to shift to the State and local level governmental functions which can be carried out by State and local governments more efficiently and with greater sensitivity to the needs and desires of the people they serve. Under the amendments contained in this bill, recipients of grants for airport development will be afforded greater flexibility in managing their affairs and also will have the opportunity to take on greater responsibility with respect to carrying out the purposes of the statute.

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H.R. 9771 also contains some undesirable provisions:

- It would shift from the airlines to the Federal government the cost of inspectional services provided to aircraft arriving in the United States on Sundays and holidays. As long as the Congress continues to mandate that the inspectors be paid at overtime rates for such work, I believe the airlines should continue to pay for the special services they receive.
- It would also unnecessarily increase the Federal share of the cost of projects at general aviation airports.

I am asking the affected agencies to determine whether corrective legislation should be submitted to the Congress on these provisions.

Despite these questionable provisions, this bill is generally consistent with the policy directions of my Administration and will help to assure an improved aviation system for all our citizens.

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