

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 11, 2017

The Honorable Pete Sessions
Chairman
Committee on Rules
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Louise Slaughter
Ranking Member
Committee on Rules
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
Committee on Rules
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Sessions, Chairman Thornberry, Ranking Member Slaughter, and Ranking Member Smith:

As the House of Representatives prepares to begin consideration of H.R. 2810, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2018, we write to make clear our strong opposition to any attempts aimed at changing the current High Density (“Slot”) and Perimeter rules at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. An amendment has been filed at the House Rules Committee (numbered 328 by the Committee) which would have significant negative effects on Reagan National and Dulles International Airports. It is not only the nature of the amendment that is unsettling to us—it is deeply troubling that the offerors seek to take unprecedented action to use the NDAA as the vehicle for such controversial changes. This amendment is not germane to the bill, and we fear that if the Rules Committee makes this amendment in order it may complicate passage of this vital national security legislation.

Reagan National and Washington Dulles International Airports were designed by the federal government and operate on its behalf as an integrated system. Acknowledging the physical limitations and community impacts of aircraft noise at Reagan National, Congress mandated the Slot and Perimeter rules. Dulles International was planned as both the growth airport and international gateway for the region’s aviation needs. For over three decades, passenger volume at Dulles International grew while the Slot rule at Reagan National kept flight activity relatively stable.

Maintaining operational stability has also helped achieve balance with Thurgood Marshall Baltimore Washington International (BWI) so that the broader interests of the region are served. Our airports enable Maryland, the District of Columbia, and Virginia to access the global economy in ways that create jobs and opportunities for the region. Part of the rationale for the relocation of major corporate headquarters such as SAIC, Hilton Hotels, Nestle USA and Volkswagen of America is the connectivity our regional aviation system provides.

However, as part of the last three FAA reauthorization bills (2000, 2003 and 2012), Congress has made changes to the Slot rule which disrupted the system’s balance. After six consecutive years of growth, passenger enplanements at Reagan National overtook Dulles International in 2015 and 2016.

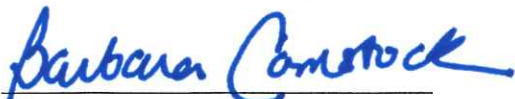
Flight activity resulting from legislative loosening of the Slot and Perimeter rules, combined with airline mergers and commercial transactions, have led to significant congestion and stress on Reagan National's facilities and a decline in commercial domestic passenger volume at Dulles International. Between 2000 and 2015, domestic enplanements at Reagan National have grown 29 percent while Dulles International has declined by 35 percent. The decline at Dulles International is, in part, attributable to changes made by Congress to the operational rules at Reagan National.

The impacts of additional modifications to existing law could financially destabilize Dulles International at a time when the airport is still recovering from previous slot and perimeter alterations and external economic factors. Investments made by the Airports Authority from 1990 to 2010 resulted in over \$4 billion in debt. Further complicating the repayment of this debt is the decrease in the number of airlines and passengers, the culmination of which makes Dulles International more expensive and thus less competitive. History has shown that increasing slots, changing aircraft utilization, or expanding the perimeter results in local and regional economic volatility, increased aircraft noise, and anti-competitive practices.

We are acutely concerned about the amendment in question, which essentially asks the Rules Committee to consider facilitating an end-run to change these important rules. We respectfully request that you not entertain such an unrelated, controversial request and that you rule the amendment out of order. Again, to make any such changes to the Slot or Perimeter rules through the NDAA would be unprecedented. There is no direct (or indirect) cause to show that changing the Slot or Perimeter rules would improve our national security.

No Member of Congress appreciates another representative meddling with the assets in their state or district. We, too, strongly oppose any attempts by other Members to dictate operations at these airports for their own personal convenience at great cost to our communities and constituents. We have seen in past debates that proposals to change the Slot and Perimeter rules have threatened to derail the entire FAA reauthorization process. We expect that entertaining such changes within the NDAA would also have detrimental effects on this ever important national security legislation. We would all be better served by avoiding repetition of this debate so that all Members may focus on improving the security of the country. For these reasons, we look forward to working with you and the House Armed Services Committee to pass an NDAA that leaves intact the current rules governing operations at Reagan National Airport. Copies of this letter will be transmitted to House Leadership, all Rules Committee members, and the Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

Sincerely,



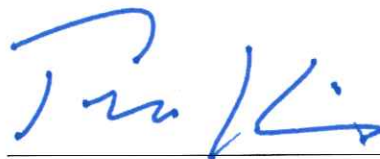
BARBARA COMSTOCK
Member of Congress



MARK R. WARNER
U.S. Senator



GERALD E. CONNOLLY
Member of Congress



TIM KAINE
U.S. Senator



BOB GOODLATTE
Member of Congress



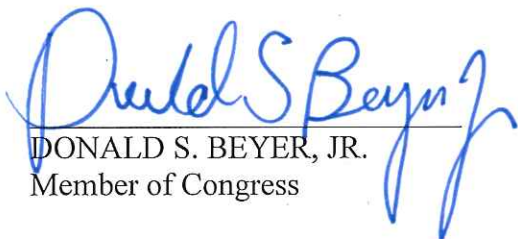
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