



GAAC
General Aviation Airport Coalition

HOUSE PASSES LEGISLATION TO REAUTHORIZE FAA PROGRAMS

On Friday, April 1st, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 658, the FAA Reauthorization and Reform Act. The bill authorizes \$60.7 billion for the FAA's capital programs through FY 2014. The last enacted multi-year FAA authorization (P.L. 108-176) expired in September 2007. Programs governed by this measure have been continued by enactment of 18 short-term extensions, the latest of which expires May 31st.

Earlier this year, the Senate passed a two-year FAA reauthorization (S. 223) by a vote of 87-8. A House-Senate conference committee will now resolve the differences between H.R. 659 and S. 223 in order for a final bill to be agreed upon by both chambers.

Major differences, however, exist between the House and Senate bills. The Senate bill is two years compared with the House bill's four years, but the average authorization levels per year are higher in the Senate bill. There also are major policy differences between the House and Senate versions, including how they deal with foreign aircraft repair stations, passenger facility charges, the Essential Air Service program, the National Mediation Board, and the NextGen air traffic control system.

The General Aviation Airport Coalition opposes the following two provisions in the House-passed bill and will push for changes in the final version of the FAA Reauthorization bill.

- **Airport Improvement Program** — The Airport Improvement Program (AIP) provides grants to airports for various projects, including airport planning and development, and noise compatibility programs. The House bill, H.R. 658, authorizes \$12.2 billion in contract authority from the aviation trust fund for the AIP to be allocated as follows: \$3.2 billion in FY 2011, and \$3 billion in each of FY 2012 through FY 2014. In comparison, the Senate bill, S. 223, increases funding to \$4.1 billion. Both the House and Senate bill keep the passenger facility charge at \$4.50
- **Essential Air Service** — The Essential Air Service (EAS) program subsidizes airline flights to rural communities. The bill authorizes the appropriation of \$98 million in FY 2011, \$60 million in FY 2012, and \$30 million in FY 2013 for the EAS program. These amounts are in addition to the \$50 million per year the EAS program is currently authorized to receive from FAA collection of overflight fees.

More importantly, H.R. 658 sunsets the EAS program everywhere except Alaska and Hawaii as of FY 2014. Beginning in FY 2014, the EAS program would receive from overflight fees only the amount needed to provide essential air service to eligible communities in Alaska and Hawaii. Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee Chairman Jay Rockefeller (D-W.Va.) is one of many lawmakers who are fierce defenders of the program and are likely to strongly resist its elimination.