

able to hire 660 new employees entirely devoted to passenger safety.

Even though our planes are among the safest in the world, as last month's tragedy in Florida showed us, we are still not as safe as we should be.

Although I am disappointed that this bill doesn't provide any new funding for the Northeast corridor, the most traveled passenger rail route in the country, I understand that there is a balance from previous appropriations to fund the continued construction of this project.

I urge my colleagues to support this open rule and to support this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Wisconsin [Mr. OBEY], the ranking member of the Committee on Appropriations.

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, I simply want to say I support this rule. It is far preferable than the rule that we just considered. I would simply observe that with respect to the previous rule, this country has walked away from our values in dealing with trade. There is absolutely no reason in my view for us to provide MFN treatment for a country that produces goods through slave labor. I think it is a preposterous joke that we should in any way give credence to the idea that a country with a controlled economy is a fitting participant in free- or fair-trade arrangements. By definition, they are not. I thank the gentleman for his time.

Mr. MOAKLEY. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. GREENE of Utah. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time, and I move the previous question on the resolution.

The previous question was ordered.

The resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. GREENE of Utah. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous matter on House Resolution 460.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Utah?

There was no objection.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 3675, making appropriations for the Department of Transportation and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1997, and that I may be permitted to submit tables, charts, and other extraneous material.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Virginia?

There was no objection.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATION ACT, 1997

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 460 and rule XXIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill, H.R. 23675.

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IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill (H.R. 3675) making appropriations for the Department of Transportation and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1997, and for other purposes, with Mr. BEREUTER in the Chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the rule, the bill is considered as having been read the first time.

Under the rule, the gentleman from Virginia [Mr. WOLF] and the gentleman from Minnesota [Mr. SABO] will each be recognized for 30 minutes.

The Chair recognize the gentleman from Virginia [Mr. WOLF].

(Mr. WOLF asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

In the interests of brevity, Mr. Chairman, and because everyone, including the staff, ought to be able to go home, I will include my remarks.

Mr. Chairman, today I am proud to present to the House H.R. 3675, the transportation appropriations bill for fiscal year 1997. I believe this is a very good bill which will improve aviation and highway safety, provide essential funding for highways and other infrastructure improvements across the country, and maintain the Federal Government's commitment to help localities and Amtrak with assistance in their operating budgets. This is a balanced bill, created in a bipartisan manner under difficult budget constraints.

Before I go any further, Mr. Chairman, I want to recognize the huge contributions of the gentleman from Texas [Mr. COLEMAN] in putting together this bill, and past bills, in a truly bipartisan fashion.

This will be the gentleman's last transportation appropriations bill, and I want to say how much I appreciate his diligence and hard work, and his true concern for transportation safety and infrastructure around this country. He will be sorely missed, and we all wish him well.

As all of us know, Mr. Chairman, the coming fiscal year will be very difficult, as we continue to tighten our belt on the way to a balanced budget. This is even more painful with each passing year, because the easiest budget reductions have already been made. Yet this body has shown its strong and unwavering commitment to eliminating the deficit by the year 2002, so some continued sacrifices will be needed.

Before I get into specifics of the bill, let me put the larger budget numbers in perspective.

This year, our 602(b) allocation in new outlays is \$11.4 billion, which is the same level as last year. This might not seem too difficult until you realize that just to fund things like the employee pay raise, normal inflation in employee medical insurance and other benefits, and general inflation in goods and services, the Department of Transportation would need \$250 million more than it received in fiscal year 1996.

And if you use the President's budget as the baseline instead of the current level of funding, even greater reductions are required, because the budget proposed a large increase in new outlays. Combined with the money we need to pay off debts from past years, our budget allocation puts us \$359 million in outlays below the administration's request. So very difficult choices had to be made below the level of their request.

This bill sets priorities with the limited resources we have available. What are those priorities?

Safety: Maintaining and improving safety is the number one priority in this bill, above everything else. The recent aviation accidents have convinced many of us that more needs to be done, and there are other troubling signs as well. Fraudulent and unapproved aircraft parts now get inside our commercial airliners all too often. And our aging air traffic control equipment raises concerns.

Last year, air traffic centers all over the country experienced breakdowns in important radar and communication systems. And air traffic controllers are getting stretched thin as air traffic increases without consistent growth in staffing.

To deal with these problems, the bill before the House today raises funding for air traffic control operations by about 6 percent, providing funds for 250 additional air traffic controllers and 373 new staff in aviation safety inspection and oversight. The bill also adds \$139 million, not in the President's request, for new air traffic control equipment and systems to improve safety and airway capacity.

Because of the extremely serious questions surfacing now over aviation safety and the FAA's oversight, the bill appropriates \$2.4 million for a blue-ribbon commission to perform a comprehensive review of aviation safety, financing, and acquisition. Over the past few weeks, we've seen FAA inspectors and the Transportation Inspector General testify before the House and Senate about safety problems. We read about internal FAA memos raising safety alarms which go ignored by management.

And we know how long it takes the FAA to procure and install new safety equipment. These problems must be addressed in a comprehensive, non-political and professional way.

This high level commission will be bipartisan, and will have adequate funding to analyze in-depth the aviation safety situation in the United States, the FAA's financing problems, and its organization. I intend to offer an amendment to the FAA authorization bill which provides the authorization for this commission when that bill is before the House later this summer. The chairman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee agrees with me on this approach. He supports this language, and I am pleased that the appropriations bill provides funds for this important activity.

And we must do more in other safety areas as well, or at least hold the line in the face of