



Congressman Tim Bishop

FIRST DISTRICT -- NEW YORK

NEWS RELEASE

JUNE 28, 2007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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BISHOP MEASURE PROTECTS AIRLINE PASSENGERS FROM FUEL TANK EXPLOSIONS

*Congressman directs FAA to implement technology that could have prevented
TWA Flight 800 crash*

Nearly eleven years ago, the crash of TWA Flight 800 off the coast of eastern Long Island claimed the lives of all 230 passengers and crew, and led to one of the most expensive investigations in aviation history. Still, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has not implemented regulations requiring airlines to upgrade their existing fleet of over 3,800 commercial airplanes with available, life-saving technology known as fuel tank inerting systems, which could prevent future aviation catastrophes.

Today, Congressman Tim Bishop (NY-1) successfully inserted language in the Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization Act to direct the FAA to finalize and implement a final regulation requiring the installation of fuel tank inerting systems on transport aircraft by the end of the year.

"Flight 800 was a tragedy, but to knowingly let it happen again would be criminal negligence," said Bishop. "History suggests that there will be future accidents unless all aircraft are upgraded with these fuel tank inerting systems. Unfortunately, since the FAA has chosen to do nothing, I am ensuring that that they are directed by Congress to take action to save lives."

"It's been more than ten years since this terrible accident, and the FAA continues to drag its feet on a fix that will save lives," Senator Charles Schumer said. "If there was ever a case where a stitch in time saves nine, this is it. I applaud Congressman Bishop for his work on this issue and having this important provision included in the bill. I will fight on the Senate side to ensure that this problem is fixed once and for all."

In August of 2000, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), the independent government agency charged with investigating transportation catastrophes, determined that the explosion of Flight 800's center wing fuel tank caused the mid-flight break-up of the plane. The NTSB subsequently recommended the installation of fuel tank inerting systems to correct the problem. In addition to Flight 800, two other subsequent air disasters are attributed to the same vulnerability. To date, the FAA has not implemented the NTSB recommendations.

All federal and military aircraft, including Air Force One, are required to install fuel tank inerting systems. Civilian passengers do not have the same protection. Although the FAA issued a notice of proposed rulemaking in November of 2006 to require the airlines to install inerting

systems on their planes and while recent advances have made such technology more affordable for airlines to install these upgrades, the proposed rule was never finalized or implemented. As a result, it is unclear when, if ever, the U.S. commercial fleet will be upgraded with this life-saving technology.

Congressman Bishop's directive would require that the FAA finalize and implement a final regulation requiring the installation of fuel tank inerting systems on transport aircraft (commercial, cargo and other planes), thereby minimizing the possibility of another horrific, yet highly preventable, air disaster. The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee approved the FAA Reauthorization Act today. It is expected that the bill will be considered by the full House later this summer.

Senator Schumer is the author of the Flight 800 Improvement Act of 2007 that directs the FAA to finalize and implement, not later than January 1, 2008, a proposed rule relating to the reduction of fuel tank flammability in transport category airplanes; and study and report on ways to improve the safety and reduce the flammability of fuel tanks located on airplane wings. It also authorizes the FAA to provide matching funds to airplane operators and manufacturers for complying with such rule.

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