

Alaska State Legislature

Senator John Cowdery, Chair
Phone (907) 269-0222



Senator Jerry Ward, Vice-Chair
Phone: (907) 269-0106

Senate Transportation Committee

For Immediate Release: Sept. 24, 2001
Contact: Sen. John Cowdery, 269-0222

Valuable Ideas Gathered at Hearing

(ANCHORAGE) – Representatives from all areas of the airline industry, ranging from a vice-president of a major airline to a local airport skycap, testified before the Senate Transportation Committee today, sharing ways to increase air safety, as well as concerns that some new policies established in the wake of the Sept. 11 jetliner hijacking by terrorists might be excessive.

“We have received a tremendous number of ideas and suggestions during this hearing and by email regarding airport and airline security,” said Sen. John Cowdery (R-Anchorage), chair of the committee. “I am pleased at how willing the industry and the public are to come together and address this issue, and I ask that everyone be patient as we work out new and effective safety measures in the future.”

Those testifying during the hearing identified problems and offered solutions. Pilots, delivery drivers and airport workers described gaps in airport safety and suggested how they could be filled. A local physician explained that de-pressurizing the airplane cabin can subdue passengers, a lighting specialist demonstrated a laser that doesn't cause damage but can temporarily blind a person and a number of people suggested ways to increase cockpit security.

A number of people advocated for the return of sky marshals and others suggested that pilots should be armed or that individuals with concealed-carry permits should be allowed to take their weapons on board aircraft. And several suggested that the responsibility for security should be transferred from the airlines to the federal government.

Cowdery agreed. “I don't think that we necessarily need FBI agents or federal marshals guarding the gates, but the federal government should be training and staffing these security points. Our national security should be a federal responsibility.”

New policies created in the wake of the September 11 tragedy have had unintended consequences, such as a blanket Federal Aviation Administration rule excluding vehicles from a 300 foot buffer zone around airports that closed a nearby state highway in Wrangell. Regulations prohibiting mail or cargo on passenger planes temporarily grounded “combo” aircraft in Alaska that carry both cargo and passengers. And the decision by the airline industry to drop skycap and bag storage services at airports could cost jobs as well as the services that passengers depend on.

- more -

Page 2 – Sept. 24, 2001
Airline Safety Hearing

“The next few months and years are going to be a period of trial and error as we seek to improve security without unnecessarily sacrificing privacy or reasonable convenience,” said Cowdery. “This is especially true here in Alaska, where our air travel and airports do not fit the mold of the Lower 48.”

The committee will summarize the testimony from this hearing in a report sent to appropriate public and private officials as well as to Alaska’s Congressional delegation. The summary will also be available on the Senate Transportation Committee web site at <http://www.akrepublicans.org/22ndleg/sentrans.shtml>

#