

Airline Labor Strongly Objects to "Open Skies" Agreement

Labor leaders from the AFL-CIO's Transportation Trades Department, ALPA, the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, the Transport Workers Union of America, the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, and the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers, issued the following statement in response to the tentative agreement reached last week between the Bush Administration and the European Union:

"We strongly object to the tentative air transport agreement that the Bush Administration reached with the European Union last week. This agreement is not in the best interests of U.S. aviation workers or our economy.

"While the proposed agreement has serious ramifications, which must yet be thoroughly understood, the Bush administration has apparently committed to allowing greater foreign ownership of U.S. airlines. And we are particularly concerned about a franchising provision that would allow foreign investors to control the operational decisions of our airlines.

"Just last year Congress overwhelmingly rejected administration attempts to impose new rules that would have permitted foreign interests to exercise control over U.S. airlines in violation of existing laws. Now the administration seems to be trying to achieve the same objective by other means. Moreover, the administration has committed to further talks with the EU, beginning as early as later this year, to discuss the possibility of changing U.S. ownership and control laws and allowing foreign airlines to fly in our domestic market, deepening our opposition.

"We are also disappointed with the process followed in these negotiations. Complex and substantial proposals with deep implications for the U.S. aviation industry and its workers were exchanged without providing adequate opportunity for review and comment by interested stakeholders.

"Congress has always played an integral role in shaping U.S. aviation policy. We will urge Congress to vigorously exercise its oversight authority. It is imperative that our government explain how the various complex provisions of the tentative agreement would work and how they would benefit U.S. interests, including U.S. airline workers.

"The burden of demonstrating that the proposed agreement is in the interest of the United States is on the Administration, and to date, that burden has not been met. Accordingly, we oppose this tentative agreement and will mobilize our members to speak out against it to their members of Congress."