

Washington, D.C. - U.S. Representatives David Price (D-NC) and John J. Duncan, Jr. (R-TN) today renewed their effort to improve federal aviation safety. They have sponsored legislation to equip new commercial aircraft with a back-up "black box" – the cockpit voice and flight data recorder – that would enhance investigators' ability to collect information in the wake of a crash. By re-introducing the Safe Aviation Flight Enhancement (SAFE) Act, the congressmen hope to enact a key recommendation of the 9/11 Commission.

"Federal investigators rely on the information contained in these black boxes in order to piece together the events that lead to a flight disaster," said Price, who is Chairman of the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee. "Their findings help us to determine the causes and then recommend actions to prevent a recurrence in the future. And in our post-9/11 world, it is important to have this information as soon as possible so that we can determine whether an incident is a threat to our national security."

"Our current black box standards have proven inadequate given the threats of terrorism to our transportation systems," said Duncan, former Chairman of the Aviation Subcommittee. "Post 9/11, we cannot afford to wait. We need to know immediately what happened in the event of an aviation disaster, and this legislation represents a simple solution to a serious problem by allowing commercial aviation to benefit from black box technology that has proven successful in our military."

The SAFE Act would require that new commercial aircraft designed for extended-range flights have a second black box that can deploy from the rear of the aircraft upon impact. It would be equipped with satellite technology to transmit its location, allowing for its immediate recovery. The box would contain both a Cockpit Voice Recorder (CVR) and a Flight Data Recorder (FDR).

Since 1996, eight major commercial airline accidents have occurred in which the immediate cause was unknown and recovery of black boxes was significantly delayed. On average, it has taken investigators eight days to recover flight data recorders and fifteen days to recover cockpit voice recorders from the wreckage of these accidents. Data from two of the airplanes involved in the 9/11 attacks were never recovered.

The 9/11 Commission noted that "maximizing the amount of evidence to recreate the events of a terrorist attack is critical to understanding precisely what happened, which in turn translates

into more comprehensive 'lessons learned.'" The Commission specifically recommended that the federal government take steps to improve the survivability of flight data recorders and cockpit voice recorders to ensure that complete and reliable information is available to investigators in the aftermath of a terrorist attack.

"The ability to recover and analyze data from black box recorders is immensely important for after-accident investigators, which is why we originally proposed the use of deployable black boxes in 1999," said Jim Hall, former Chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). "I was directly involved in several accident investigations where it took us seven days or more to recover the black boxes from the ocean. If similar delays occurred today, especially over the ocean, officials may shut down the airspace out of fear that it was a terrorist attack, when in fact it could be the result of a mechanical failure. Such uncertainty would have devastating long term effects on the aviation industry. Since current federal regulators have not acted on the NTSB's recommendations from 1999, I strongly applaud this effort in Congress to enhance the safety of air travel."

The SAFE Act has also been endorsed by representatives from major airline disasters such as the National Air Disaster Alliance/ Foundation (NADA/F), as well as by TWA 800 and 9/11 victim advocates.

"NADA/F praises our Congressional leaders for understanding that we simply cannot afford to ignore the glaring deficiencies in our current recorder regulations," said Gail Dunham, NADA/F President. "Given the many past recorder problems, it is clear that U.S. officials must be better equipped to respond to an aviation disaster in the future, and prompt recovery of the recorder information is necessary for a prompt response."

Also joining Price and Duncan as original cosponsors of the SAFE Act are Rep. Harold Rogers (R-KY), Ranking Member on the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee, along with Reps. John Boozman (R-AR), Mike Capuano (D-MA), Bob Etheridge (D-NC), Bill Pascrell (D-NJ), Steven Rothman (D-NJ) and Lee Terry (R-NE).

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