

WASHINGTON - House Majority Whip Roy Blunt (MO) and House Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer (MD) today introduced the "Capitol Airspace Enforcement Act", bipartisan legislation that aims to prevent violations of restricted airspace around Washington, D.C.

"The massive disruption caused by pilots who are either negligent or unaware of the airspace restrictions around the nation's capital must be promptly addressed. Local law enforcement officers and government officials need to focus on the very real threat of terrorism to Washington, DC, and should not have their attention diverted," said Hoyer.

"In an era in which our security personnel must be particularly vigilant, and our budget hawks must be especially thrifty, needless evacuations of federal buildings are a drain on our resources and an unnecessary diversion," Blunt said. "The bill Mr. Hoyer and I are introducing will require pilots to be properly educated and, after that, punish them if they ignore the flight restrictions in this area."

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the Transportation Safety Administration (TSA) restricted travel in the airspace in the area around Washington, DC. Within the last year, there have been three occasions in which the violation of airspace has resulted in the evacuation of the White House and the Capitol complex. In the May 11th evacuation, officials estimate that 35,000 people were evacuated from the Capitol and adjacent office complexes, as well as 200 people from the White House.

Evacuations cost taxpayers money and temporarily disrupt the work of tens of thousands of federal employees. In addition, there is concern that "crying wolf" and conducting unnecessary emergency evacuations will lessen the sense of urgency in subsequent emergencies.

The new legislation would impose fines of between \$10,000 and \$100,000 for pilots who violate the District of Columbia Flight Restriction Zone (DC FRZ), which is 15 miles around Reagan National Airport, and fines of up to \$5,000 for pilots who violate the District of Columbia Air Defense Identification Zone (DC ADIZ), which is 30 to 45 miles around the District of Columbia metropolitan area. Pilots who violate the DC FRZ would also have their pilot certificate revoked by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) for between 2 and 5 years. In addition, the legislation requires the FAA to provide pilots with specialized instruction on compliance with flight restrictions in and around special flight rule areas.

“This legislation sends an unequivocal message to pilots that they must abide by airspace restrictions when flying around Washington or they will face stiff penalties. And the FAA must do its part to educate pilots to ensure they are fully aware of local regulations,” concluded Hoyer.

“When tens of thousands of federal employees are evacuated from their offices on a false alarm, the taxpayers who pay them lose,” Blunt said.

"Our bill sends the signal to pilots that we're serious about protecting the area around the Capitol and White House, and there will be repercussions to negligence.”

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