

Testimony of Senator Frank R. Lautenberg
H.R. 969 / S. 1524 -- The Airline Cabin Air Quality Act of 1995
House Aviation Subcommittee
Subcommittee on Transportation and Infrastructure
July 16, 1996

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to testify today in support of legislation to prohibit smoking on international flights to and from the United States. As the Senate author of the smoking ban for domestic flights, and the Senate sponsor of the legislation before you, I am pleased that you have called this hearing. Enactment of this legislation would provide critical protection for the thousands of passengers and flight crews who travel internationally, and who are now subjected to the irritation and dangers of secondhand smoke.

Mr. Chairman, more than 50,000 studies have implicated cigarette smoking as a direct cause of death and disability. Volumes of evidence document the serious health effects of exposure to environmental tobacco smoke. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that environmental tobacco smoke causes approximately 3,000 lung cancer and 12,000 other cancer deaths each year. And EPA believes that 70 percent of these lung cancer deaths result from exposure to environmental tobacco smoke outside the home -- including on airplanes.

Mr. Chairman, beyond the risks of lung cancer and other deadly diseases, passengers traveling on smoke-filled international flights can suffer from discomfort, irritation and less serious health problems. Environmental tobacco smoke exposure leads to coughing, chest discomfort and reduced lung function in nonsmoking adults. These symptoms can cause permanent health problems, especially to passengers with asthma, allergies or other respiratory problems.

This issue is of particular ^{“great significance”} importance for flight attendants. Flight attendants who routinely work international flights often complain of respiratory problems and other health difficulties relating to passive smoke. Those who fly frequently to and from Latin America and Asia face special problems; not only can these flights last up to fourteen or sixteen hours,

they usually accommodate the most smoking passengers.

Mr. Chairman, in September of 1992, the International Civil Aviation Organization approved a non-binding resolution urging all governments to ban smoking on international flights as a safety and health measure. The resolution called for the ban to be in place by July 1, 1996.

Unfortunately, this voluntary measure fell far short of its goal. Only 13 percent of the ICAO's more than 300 members have taken the necessary steps to implement the ban. However, some progress has been made. As a result of an agreement between the U.S., Canada and Australia, passengers between these countries need not suffer through a smoke-filled flight. Lufthansa and Finnair also have agreed to prohibit smoking on flights between their countries and the United States. Still, there are far too few examples of this type of international cooperation. Moreover, no significant improvement has occurred on South American or Asian routes.

Mr. Chairman, many U.S. carriers have demonstrated their support for the ban, which lowers their maintenance costs. Already, USAir and Delta ban smoking on all flights. I salute these carriers -- if they can ban smoking and remain competitive, why can't all airlines?

As of June 1, about 80 percent of nonstop, scheduled U.S. airline flights between U.S. and foreign points are smoke-free. While this may sound good, most of the 80 percent represents comparatively short flights across the Atlantic. This figure may be misleading. If one views the flight data on a mileage basis, almost half the miles flown by U.S. carriers on foreign flights are subject to the hazards of inflight smoking. Passengers and flight attendants on the longer South American, and the much longer Asian routes, still have virtually no protection from the dangers of second hand smoke.

In addition, each year millions of Americans fly international carriers, whether because of cost, convenience or simply because American carriers do not provide service to a specific destination. And most of these Americans are being subjected to the discomfort and danger

of second hand smoke.

Mr. Chairman, although I wish that other countries would voluntarily enter into bilateral agreements with the U.S., that does not seem likely. The Congress should enact this legislation to create a level playing field for U.S. carriers and to protect the health and safety of international air travelers and the flight crews.

Again, thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to testify today. I hope the Subcommittee will move quickly to approve this legislation.