

military family, they served alongside of him. To each of them, I express my gratitude and that of this grateful Nation.

My thoughts are with all of General Abrams' loved ones today, along with my deep gratitude. Thank you for sharing your father, your husband, your brother with the rest of this country that he served so valiantly for so long. God bless him and his legacy. God bless the troops he cared so deeply about and led so ably. God bless the United States of America.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

FAA REAUTHORIZATION

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I rise today to express my frustration—my outrage—that this body is poised to miss a historic, once-in-a-generation opportunity to stop the major airlines from gouging Americans with exorbitant fees every time they fly.

In the dark of night early Saturday morning, House and Senate committee leadership released a Federal Aviation Administration reauthorization bill that does not include a commonsense, bipartisan provision to protect passengers from having to pay \$200 to change a ticket that costs \$250—a provision that would have protected a family from paying \$200 to cancel a flight because another family member had fallen seriously ill and a vacation had to be canceled.

Instead, after months of lobbying against my bipartisan FAIR Fees provision, the airlines won and airline passengers lost. I would compare it to the Christians and the lions, but in this story, the Christians even had to pay extra to enter the amphitheater.

What once were considered the basic services of flying have now become optional and with a massive price tag—checking a bag, carrying on a bag, flying standby for an earlier flight, printing a boarding pass, early boarding, seat selection, changing or canceling your flight, even a blanket and pillow.

Air travelers are being nicked-and-dimed, but the real cost is in the billions of dollars. That is because the major airlines have turned fees into a multibillion-dollar industry. Last year, the airlines raked in \$7.4 billion in fees. More than \$4.5 billion came from now having to pay to check your bag, and \$2.9 billion was extra fees if you wanted to change your ticket or if you wanted to cancel your ticket. That is billions of dollars. That is actually the equivalent of 11 million flights from Washington, DC, to Boston. That is the cost that is now imposed upon consumers. Passengers think they are buying low-cost fares, but they are really just victims of airline greed in support of a new multibillion-dollar profit center.

Even in the past few weeks, as we worked in Congress to include important consumer protection measures in this final FAA legislation, the airlines continued to raise their fees.

Last month, JetBlue Airways raised its change and cancellation fees from

\$150 to \$200 for certain flights. They also raised fees for a passenger's first checked bag from \$25 to \$30 and increased the fees for a second checked bag from \$35 to \$40. That is \$140 to check two bags for a round trip. Shortly after, United Airlines, Delta Airlines, and American Airlines followed suit, raising their bag fees to match JetBlue's.

In college, I might have spent more time being interested in politics than economics, but I thought competition was supposed to drive prices down and not up. So why are the airlines charging these fees? Well, the first answer is, because they can, but the real answer is, because there is no competition among domestic airlines.

In the past 10 years, we have gone from 10 major airlines down to just 4. Only four airlines control 85 percent of traffic in the skies. The only thing competitive about the current airline industry is the fight for overhead compartment space. Americans have more choice in where to eat at the airport than which airline they can take.

We know that when choice goes down, fees go up. And these sky-high fees bear almost no resemblance to the cost of the services being provided. The Government Accountability Office, GAO, recently released a report confirming what countless passengers across the country already know to be true: Airlines are gouging captive passengers to line their pockets, not to cover the actual cost of the services provided.

Does it really cost \$200 for American Airlines to change a ticket? Does it really cost Delta Air Lines \$40 to load that second bag—\$10 more than processing the first bag? Airlines are increasing their fees in order to match their competitors. They are actively seeking to deceive passengers by offering artificially low fares and then charging exorbitant fees on the back end.

Enough is enough. It is time we put a stop to these abusive practices. That is why Republican Senator ROGER WICKER of Mississippi and I joined together to get our provision ensuring change and cancellation fees are reasonable into the Senate FAA reauthorization bill.

When a liberal from New England and a Republican from the Deep South can agree on policy, we are on the right side of history. Yet the airline industry had other plans. They stated their No. 1 priority in the FAA reauthorization was defeating our FAIR Fees provision.

What is it about this provision that they would stop at nothing to block it from becoming law? Why would the airline industries band together on this one issue? They don't compete truly against each other in the marketplace. Here, they could all come together on one policy. It is because they don't want the Department of Transportation to assess whether change and cancellation, baggage, and other fees are reasonable and proportional to the costs of the services provided. They

don't want to ensure change and cancellation fees are reasonable. That is all that our provision does—ensure that these fees are reasonable and proportional to the cost of the services being provided by the airlines to the customer. That is it. It is as commonsense and as straightforward as you would want an airline passenger to receive from their airline—fair and reasonable.

No price is determined by this amendment—only that it has to be fair and reasonable and related to the cost that is, in fact, borne by the airlines in order to provide that service. How onerous could that be on an airline? Why can't we get that passed through this body so that consumers don't get tipped upside down at the counter as they try to change a ticket or to cancel a ticket? Why can't we get that passed?

If a child gets sick and a passenger has to change or cancel a flight weeks in advance, does it really cost Delta Air Lines \$200 to cancel that ticket? If a meeting gets postponed so a ticket has to be canceled 2 weeks before departure, is it fair for United Airlines to charge \$200 for a ticket that costs about that same amount? Are those fees proportional when the airlines can still resell the vacated seat, even if the passenger cancels weeks ahead of time?

Think about that. The passenger gives the airline 2 weeks' notice. Then, they have to pay a fine, \$200. Then, the airline resells the ticket to another passenger. What is the cost to the airline in that kind of situation? Or are they just exploiting the vulnerability of the passenger who has to change it? They have resold the ticket for the same price or higher to another passenger.

The answer is no. Passengers have no choice. They have no alternative.

The market has failed, leaving these flyers vulnerable to fee gouging and corporate greed from the airlines. You are at the counter, and they can say: Go to another airline.

And you say: Well, there are no other airlines at this airport that fly to my destination. It is the only airline I can rely upon.

Well, then, pay the cancellation fee, pay the change fee because you are not at a marketplace where you can then say: There is another airline I can go to right here at this airport that will take me to that destination nonstop.

In fact, the only thing the airline industry was more committed to doing than raising airline fees was defeating the consumer protection provision in the FAA bill. We still have an opportunity to right this wrong. Tomorrow the House of Representatives will consider the FAA reauthorization bill. On behalf of the flying public—the millions of Americans who are subjected to ridiculous airline fees—I call on the House to add the FAIR Fees provision to the FAA reauthorization bill, and I call on my Senate colleagues to support it. It is time to stop nickel-and-dime American families and ensure

that they are flying the fair and friendly skies. Otherwise, these billions of dollars, year after year, will come out of the pockets of consumers who have no choice.

Senator WICKER and I worked together to build it into the Senate bill. We should not have receded to the position of the House. That was a mistake. This history is going to continue because the anger of the flying public is only going to build as each and every month and year goes by. The day is going to come, I vow to you, where we are going to have this in a bill that passes this Chamber and the House of Representatives.

This is an issue whose time has come. If it has been blocked, it is only temporarily. We are going to return to this issue. Everyone in the Congress will be made accountable to the flying public so that they are not given this offer they can't refuse every time they are at the counter: Pay or don't fly. It is absolutely wrong.

At this point, I yield back.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TILLIS). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. JOHNSON). Without objection, it is so ordered.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that all postcloture time on Executive Calendar No. 941 be considered expired at 1:45 p.m. on Wednesday, September 26; that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table; and that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session for a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO JIM PAXTON

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, at the end of this month, my friend Jim Paxton will end his 32-year tenure with the Paducah Sun newspaper in western Kentucky. Through his service as the paper's editor and publisher, Jim has shown a dedication to his community and his organization, and he deserves our sincere gratitude. Looking back at

his experience with the paper, Jim called it, "the best job a person could ask for." It is my privilege to congratulate him on his remarkable career in journalism.

Founded more than 120 years ago as the Paducah Evening Sun, Jim's newspaper has always been a family business. Before joining the paper, Jim worked with other news organizations in Nashville and Lexington and went to law school. However, after a tragic aviation accident that claimed the life of the Sun's previous editor, Jack Paxton, Jim left his legal career behind and agreed to lead the local institution.

Jim began at the Sun in 1986 and soon after earned the title of editor. With his brothers David and Richard, who later joined the company, the family expanded their media offering to better serve their community. The story of Paducah is intertwined with the region's river system, and the Sun has the news that its readers need for their day. There is a great deal of local news to cover. Paducah is the heart of our Nation's inland waterways network, and it is home to both the National Quilt Museum and the U.S. Department of Energy's Gaseous Diffusion Plant. Further, in 2013, the U.N. Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, designated Paducah as the world's seventh City of Crafts and Folk Art. The Paducah Sun, under Jim's leadership, has kept a close eye on each of these aspects of the city's life and heritage.

In recent years, Jim has taken a leading role in crafting the Sun's editorial page, a page of his paper I rarely miss. I have especially enjoyed each of my opportunities to meet with the paper's editorial board to discuss the issues most vital to Paducah's future. By presenting a fair and even-handed opinion to his audience, Jim and the Sun's staff have made themselves a central feature of the day for many western Kentuckians.

When Jim leaves his post at the end of this month, he does so after a career filled with distinction and one he can be proud of. Whatever the future may hold for Jim and his family, I send them my sincere best wishes. Families throughout Paducah and across the Commonwealth have benefited from Jim's diligence and thoughtfulness, and I would like to express my profound gratitude to him. I ask my Senate colleagues to join me in congratulating Jim Paxton, the gold standard for a professional newsman, on a successful career and wishing him a happy retirement.

CAIRO HOUSING CRISIS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today I would like to bring attention to the southernmost city in my State, Cairo, IL.

Sitting at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, Cairo was once a booming port town and was home to

Fort Defiance during the Civil War. In the 1960s, Civil Rights icon Representative JOHN LEWIS even spent a summer there to help integrate a number of businesses and public spaces.

However, in recent years, this southern city has faced a new challenge, as uninhabitable living conditions have forced hundreds of public housing residents to relocate from their homes—and in many cases from their beloved community. Public housing in the city suffered years of neglect at the hands of local officials who are now accused of misusing Federal funds to bankroll lavish personal expenses, including multiple trips to Las Vegas and steak dinners.

And how was life for residents? By the time residents were forced to relocate, 185 families—including roughly 200 children—were living in housing overrun with rodents, bedbugs, roaches, crime, mold, asbestos, and lead. I am talking about rats in the couch, maggots in the freeze, and plumbing and heating that simply refused to work.

It was local officials who failed to provide its residents with safe and healthy housing; yet these families were the ones whose lives were uprooted as a result. Today, all 185 families have relocated, and the vacant housing complexes are set to be demolished. While the strength and resilience of these residents and their community in the face of this situation is inspiring, there is no question they deserved far more from their government.

It has been more than 2 years since the HUD Inspector General's Office began investigating alleged misuse of Federal funds by local officials, and it is beyond time for that investigation to be finalized and for the results to be made public.

Today I am calling—once again—for the HUD inspector general to do just that, but more remains to be done to restore the faith and confidence of public housing residents in our government. Transparent accountability must be had at all levels of government where mismanagement played a role in creating this crisis.

This is why, in May of last year, Senator DUCKWORTH and I called for the HUD inspector general to also look into HUD's oversight of Alexander County Housing Authority. This July, the IG released its report that found that despite having early knowledge of bad conditions at Alexander County, HUD hesitated to intervene, while residents suffered.

This is unacceptable, and it cannot be repeated. HUD is responsible for ensuring public housing authorities meet their responsibility to provide safe and affordable housing, and it must be capable of performing this vital oversight. Senator DUCKWORTH and I have urged HUD to quickly implement the recommendations included in the report to more effectively oversee public housing authorities, to which HUD has agreed.