

Contact: Jack Saporito, 847-506-0670

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News Release

For Immediate Release

Source: Alliance of Residents Concerning O'Hare
MAMMOTH O'HARE EXPANSION HARMS ILLINOIS

Illinois' Democratic Senator, Richard Durbin, has introduced legislation in Congress, the "National Aviation Capacity Expansion Act" (S. 1786), that could double or even triple the capacity of Chicago's O'Hare International Airport by providing for hundreds of thousands to a million or more additional flights each year.

Durbin's plan is not designed to improve safety, to fix delays, to relieve congestion, to lessen the serious impacts of aircraft noise, or to improve bad weather efficiency, but is solely, as the bill states: "To expand aviation capacity in the Chicago area."

Durbin, a reputed "environmentalist" who has publicly stated many times his "opposition" to "special interests" using anti-environmental riders to circumvent the normal legislative process and avoid public scrutiny, perpetrated the same anti-democratic action he allegedly opposes last Friday, December 7, while on the Senate floor. He attempted to place a federal mandate to massively expand O'Hare on a defense bill as a rider. His action circumvented the normal legislative process and avoided all public scrutiny of his O'Hare expansion mandate. Durbin asked his colleagues to enact his rider into federal law even though almost no Senator knew its contents. Having failed in his rider attempt, Durbin has now introduced a separate bill to do the same.

But this "pro-environmental" Senator has failed over and over again in his senate tenure to address the most serious toxic polluter in Illinois, O'Hare Airport. As Senator Durbin has been informed many times, aircraft have significant and very disturbing impacts on the earth's upper atmosphere, and airport and aircraft operations at O'Hare are causing very serious public health problems because its hazardous and toxic air emissions contain tens to hundreds of thousands of pounds of known human carcinogens and hundreds to thousands of tons of other airborne toxics in the jet exhaust emitted over the Chicago metropolitan area annually. Studies show that airport pollution and the diseases it creates are widespread, up to 32 miles from O'Hare airport, affecting 98 communities locally. Because around 1.7 million planes currently fly over the Chicago region each year, hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of people in the Chicago area already suffer harm from O'Hare's airport and aircraft toxic air pollution. The aviation industry's pollutants are largely unregulated, and its vast, adverse public health and environmental impacts include: harm to our children's health, learning, and development, increased cancers, respiratory disease and asthma, brain tumors, deaths, and scores of other diseases from the staggering amounts and various types of toxic and carcinogenic air, ground-level, and water pollution emitted by airports and aircraft around major population centers.

Moreover, such a massive expansion could only worsen the life-threatening safety and security

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problems the air industry has -- for example, according to FAA records, O'Hare has had one of the highest rates of near mid-air collisions.

Because of these reasons, to add any more flights at O'Hare, let alone to mandate that its capacity be doubled or tripled, would be unconscionable.

Durbin's bill would mandate that Ryan's, Daley's and Durbin's massive O'Hare expansion plan be built. In agreeing to this bill, these elected officials agreed to cede Illinois' authority to protect the health, safety and welfare of its people in what have been local decisions on airport development to the federal government. They also agreed to the bill's provisions to: exempt the planned mammoth expansion of O'Hare from complying with the requirements of the Clean Air Act; shortcut the process for evaluating the harmful public health and other environmental impacts of the expansion and giving consideration to less harmful alternatives by "expediting" all such environmental reviews; and to entirely cut off the National Environmental Policy Act's critical environmental review process (EIS) if Chicago's pre-construction legal processes are not completed by July 1, 2004 (by commanding the federal government to begin constructing the mammoth expansion if it has not already begun by December 1, 2004, regardless of whether the EIS has been completed). Durbin's "noise mitigation" provisions are severely inadequate because it grossly underestimates the number of people who are harmed by O'Hare's noise, fails to protect most human living areas such as multi-family dwellings, senior citizens homes, places of child care, as well as the entire outdoor environment; and fails to use the current science on noise and health. Also in his "noise mitigation" section, Durbin cynically appears to "cap" the number of flights at 2000 noise levels, yet such a cap would be in reality unenforceable under current law. Durbin also would mandate building eight runways with six parallel runways that are spaced too close together to be safe, ignoring Federal Aviation Administration safety regulations on runway spacing for simultaneous landings in bad visibility conditions as well as for take-offs and landings in good conditions.

Durbin also, to further "cement" his unjustifiable plan, intends to drastically limit the people's right to bring suit against this plan. This bill if it were to become law would set horrible precedence for other states.

The horrible tragedies of September 11 demand that we undertake a careful analysis of our transportation system and the over-reliance on problem-laden air transport. We need to bring balance and modernization to our whole transportation system. Instead of continuing to throw good money after bad into the air transportation system, which the September 11th aftermath proved to be so highly fragile, we should now put into place a balanced transportation system which includes a world-class, nation-wide high-

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speed rail system. There are better alternatives to manage and expand our transportation system and the Chicago metropolitan area's economy than to continue the uncontrolled increase of the unsustainable air transport industry.

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