



August 16, 2010

The Honorable John D. Rockefeller
Chairman
Commerce, Science & Transportation Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kay Bailey Hutchison
Ranking Member
Commerce, Science & Transportation Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Rockefeller and Ranking Member Hutchison:

The Voice on the Net (“VON”) Coalition¹ writes to express our concern that the final Federal Aviation Administration (“FAA”) reauthorization bill may include a permanent legislative ban on all voice communications, including Voice over Internet Protocol (“VoIP”), on commercial flights. The leading passenger rights group, businesses and a host of other national technology organizations, have publicly opposed this overly broad proscription. The ban would put the United States at a competitive disadvantage to the rest of the world by denying passengers a service currently enjoyed by the rest of the globe, thus blocking access to a significant and fast-growing multi-billion dollar communications marketplace.

As more commercial aircraft are equipped with broadband services, passengers will be able to take advantage of the benefits of VoIP and other features and functionalities offered by IP communications services, including text chats and file transfers that may be accessed through the passengers’ VoIP service provider. The Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”) has already determined that in-flight use of broadband services is safe (see <http://bit.ly/dxtGGV>). It would be premature at this time to restrict use of these innovative communications tools.

The VON Coalition supports the initial Senate approach to the FAA Reauthorization legislation that was absent of the so-called Hang-Up Act but relied instead on an appropriate regulatory process for determinations regarding the safety of in-flight communications tools. Unfortunately, in an effort to move the legislation, we understand that consensus language has emerged that would permanently ban all in-flight voice communications services, including VoIP, for use on U.S. aircraft. We continue to oppose any ban on in-flight voice communications. There is no evidence showing that in-flight communications are harmful or cause safety concerns. In fact, in-flight voice communication service for passengers has been deployed to 3 continents, 52 nations across Europe, Australia, Asia, and the Middle East going to 240 destinations over 7,000 different routes with generally positive results. Congress should

¹ The VON Coalition works to advance regulatory policies that enable Americans to take advantage of the promise and potential of VoIP. VON Coalition members are developing and delivering voice innovations over the Internet. VON Coalition members include AT&T, Broadvox, Cisco, Google, iBasis, Microsoft, Skype, T-Mobile, Vonage and Yahoo.



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not ignore the many benefits in-flight VoIP services offers consumers, airlines and communications providers.

In conclusion, banning an entire emerging technology is an extreme policy that must be reserved to address public safety and security concerns. The FCC is the expert agency tasked with making such determinations. Congress should not take this extraordinarily prospective step. We thank you for your continued support of in-flight connectivity, which will enhance the passenger experience while flying on commercial aircraft.

Sincerely,

/s/

Glenn S. Richards
Executive Director