

# US Senate approves two-year aviation bill

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The U.S. Senate on Thursday approved a two-year, \$35 billion blueprint (S. 223, Rockefeller) for funding air traffic control services and the next steps for modernizing that system.

Lawmakers approved the Federal Aviation Administration bill 87 to eight, throwing the issue over to the Republican-controlled House of Representatives, which is working on its own measure.

Senate Democrats brought up the bill, which had bipartisan support and mirrored legislation approved last year, partly as a way to try and bridge a widening partisan divide in Congress.

It moved through the Democratic-controlled Senate with no difficulty as it is mainly funded by ticket, fuel and other taxes and fees that do not add to growing government red ink.

Several amendments were considered.

Lawmakers agree on the need for a predictable funding source for air traffic control after a string of stop-gap spending bills and they widely support the next set of upgrades for transforming that system from radars to satellites.

The current temporary spending measure expires March 31.

Under the Senate proposal, taxes on jet fuel for general aviation, including business jets, would rise to 35.9 cents per gallon from 21.9 cents at present.

Sponsors of the financing plan expect the tax increase to raise \$400 million annually for air traffic modernization.

Senate lawmakers, in test votes, defeated amendments to roll back aviation spending to 2008 levels, or by up to \$3 billion, and to eliminate a \$170 million annual subsidy to airlines that underwrites service to remote communities.

Both amendments were proposed by Republicans as early indicators of whether the chamber would cut spending overall to reduce the budget deficit, which is forecast to reach nearly \$1.5 trillion this fiscal year.

Lawmakers approved amendments making it a crime to aim laser pointers at planes, a growing safety concern, and to misuse images captured by full body security scanners at airports, a privacy issue raised by passengers.

Senators also agreed to boost the number of direct flights from western states to Washington's Ronald Reagan National Airport, a sticking point in last year's failed effort to get a final bill approved.

This year's House bill, a four-year, \$59 billion measure, was approved by the Transportation Committee on Wednesday.

(Reporting by [John Crawley](#); Editing by [Eric Beech](#))