

**Introduction of
CONGRESSMAN JAMES L. OBERSTAR**

by

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Congressman Jim Oberstar hardly needs an introduction to this crowd. But I'm going to give him one anyway.

Jim Oberstar has represented Minnesota's Eighth District for a nearly a quarter-century -- he's now in his 12th term. And if you tack on the eleven years in which he served as chief staff assistant to his predecessor, Congressman John Blatnik, it's probably safe to say that you have here somebody who probably knows his way around the Legislative Branch pretty well. He currently serves as the senior Democrat on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

We think of him as "Mr. Aviation." So do his colleagues in the House of Representatives, where his views -- always based on his profound knowledge of the industry -- are accorded immense respect.

I first encountered Congressman Oberstar in hearings he conducted as chairman of the House Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight in the mid-80's. With Newt Gingrich sitting faithfully at his side as Ranking Minority Member, Jim made aviation -- and particularly international aviation -- a major focus of the Subcommittee's work. I was a frequent witness. Unlike most hearings, I always enjoyed the ones conducted by Jim Oberstar. You had the sense that politics was being put to one side in the interest of finding the right answers to difficult questions.

Jim brought not only his powerful intellect to the hearing room, but an inexhaustible inquisitiveness, and, most important, a largeness of spirit that kept everybody -- legislators, bureaucrats, and private sector witnesses -- focused on the public interest. He brought those same qualities to his work as chairman of the House Aviation Subcommittee between 1989 and 1994.

There isn't time, of course, to list for you all of the important achievements in Jim Oberstar's astonishing record of public service, but I will mention a few. Following the bombing of Pan Am 103, he was a member of the President's Commission on Aviation Security and Terrorism. He worked tirelessly during the summer of 1990 to implement

the Commission's recommendations. The result was the Aviation Security Improvement Act, signed in November of that year, which produced critically needed improvements in aviation security here and abroad.

Among other targets of his legislative efforts have been -- in no particular order -- the impact of computer reservation systems on competition; midair collisions and runway incursions; airline maintenance practices; floor emergency lighting systems; aging aircraft; collision avoidance systems; ground proximity warning systems; and the adequacy of safety in the commuter airline industry.

Aviation watchers know that the results of Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji's visit to Washington last week weren't entirely disappointing. The U.S. and China signed a new aviation agreement that will add a new entrant from each side, expand routes, triple the number of available codeshare points, and double the amount of service in the market. What you may not know is that Jim Oberstar was one of the key forces behind that success. I have this, by the way, from our chief aviation negotiator, Dave Marchick. Jim visited China twice in the three months leading up to Premier Zhu's visit -- once at the specific request of the State Department -- to press for an expanded agreement. During his second visit, two weeks ago, he met with Premier Zhu personally. Dave Marchick -- who speaks with some authority on this subject -- tells me that the agreement simply wouldn't have happened without Congressman Oberstar's personal intervention.

I could go on for even longer and talk about his equally impressive record of achievement in surface transportation. When he sees on his schedule that he has a meeting with the "ATA," he has to ask whether it's the Air Transport Association or the American Trucking Association. I'll say only that Jim was instrumental in the passage of ISTEA during the Bush years -- the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act -- and was a key architect of the more recent Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), the most massive and far-reaching public works initiative of our time -- with \$218 billion provided over the next six years for highways, bridges, mass transit and other projects around the country. It is a model, as you know, that aviation supporters in Congress hope to emulate in their reauthorization of our country's aviation programs.

But I'll leave surface transportation for another time and another luncheon.

Ladies and gentlemen, please give a warm International Aviation Club welcome to Congressman Jim Oberstar.

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