



OFFICE OF CONGRESSMAN RON KLEIN  
FLORIDA'S 22<sup>ND</sup> CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

August 14, 2008

---

CONTACT: Melissa Silverman, 202-225-3026, C: 202-821-8152

## **Klein, Young Call for End to Baggage Fees for Deployed Soldiers**

**Washington, D.C.** – Today, Congressmen Ron Klein (FL-22) and C.W. “Bill” Young (FL-10), the ranking Republican on the House Defense Appropriations subcommittee, called for all airlines to waive the fees for checked baggage they are currently charging soldiers traveling to and from military deployments.

Klein and Young co-authored letters to Defense Secretary Robert Gates and the Air Transport Association of America, an organization representing major U.S. airlines, urging swift negotiations to ensure that soldiers fulfilling travel orders will no longer have to pay extra fees for carrying their military equipment.

“We are all familiar with the frustrations of air travel, but this goes too far,” Klein said. “Our soldiers, who are traveling on explicit orders of the United States military, should be exempt from the hefty fees airlines currently charge for checked baggage. I know the airlines are struggling to stay afloat in today’s difficult economy, but even in tough times, there is no excuse for seeing dollar signs instead of American heroes when a soldier steps up to the check-in counter.”

In recent days, some airlines have begun to take steps to resolve the problem, but Klein and Young believe this is an industry-wide issue that must be resolved quickly and in full. The text of both letters, co-authored by Klein and Young, follows.

August 14, 2008

Secretary Robert Gates  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1300 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1300

Dear Secretary Gates:

We were saddened to read recent media reports that airlines are charging baggage fees to military servicemembers on travel orders. Specifically, according to a July 30th El Paso Times article, an airline charged Army Staff Sergeant Ashley Serrano \$100 for a third checked bag, even though the baggage contained military-issued equipment required for combat.

Though we sympathize with the airline industry's needs to cut costs and raise revenues, doing so on the backs of those who seek to protect us is ill-conceived. The airlines already waive the fee for first class passengers and some frequent flyers; it should not be difficult to ask that the airlines waive the fee for members of our military who are on their way to or from service. They have certainly earned this privilege.

We also understand that it is the general policy of the military to reimburse for baggage fees. However, we believe that our servicemembers have more important concerns than paying baggage fees, keeping track of receipts, and hoping for an eventual reimbursement.

If the airlines refuse to waive baggage fees at the check-in desk, we would like to suggest that you develop a system to bill directly to the Department of Defense so that soldiers going to war don't have to concern themselves with whether or not their reimbursements went through. We know you understand the financial burden that servicemembers and their families often face. They may not have the extra money to cover the fees up front.

We know that you join us in our deep commitment to ensuring that our servicemembers get everything they need to do their jobs effectively. We urge you to complete swift negotiations with the airline industry so that our servicemembers can travel without further financial hardship. We appreciate your attention and look forward to working with you should this matter require further Congressional attention.

Sincerely,

RON KLEIN  
Member of Congress

C.W. BILL YOUNG  
Member of Congress

August 14, 2008

James C. May  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Air Transport Association of America  
1301 Pennsylvania Ave NW Suite 1100  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mr. May:

We were saddened to read recent media reports that airlines are charging baggage fees to military servicemembers on travel orders. Specifically, according to a July 30<sup>th</sup> El Paso Times article, an airline charged Army Staff Sergeant Ashley Serrano \$100 for a third checked bag, even though the baggage contained military-issued equipment required for combat.

Though we sympathize with your industry's needs to cut costs and raise revenues, doing so on the backs of those who seek to protect us is ill-conceived. The airlines already waive the fee for first class passengers and some frequent flyers; it should not be difficult to waive the fee for members of our military who are on their way to or from service. They have certainly earned this privilege.

We also understand that it is the general policy of the military to reimburse for baggage fees. However, we believe that our servicemembers have more important concerns than paying baggage fees, keeping track of receipts, and hoping for an eventual reimbursement.

If you refuse to waive baggage fees at the check-in desk, we would like to suggest that you develop a system to bill directly to the Department of Defense so that soldiers going to war don't have to concern themselves with whether or not their reimbursements went through. We know you understand the financial burden that servicemembers and their families often face. They may not have the extra money to cover the fees up front.

We know that you join us in our deep commitment to ensuring that our servicemembers get everything they need to do their jobs effectively. We urge you to complete swift negotiations with the Department of Defense so that our servicemembers can travel without further financial hardship.

We appreciate your attention and look forward to working with you should this matter require further Congressional attention.

Sincerely,

RON KLEIN  
Member of Congress

C.W. BILL YOUNG  
Member of Congress