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## News

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### **Secretary Mineta Announces Commission On Consumer Information in Airline Industry**

U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Y. Mineta today announced the establishment of a commission that will study the travel agent industry and information available to consumers on airline services.

The National Commission to Ensure Consumer Information and Choice in the Airline Industry was created by the Aviation Investment and Reform Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (AIR-21), enacted in April 2000, to study the market position and general condition of retail travel agents in today's competitive markets for the sale of air travel services. The commission will examine whether the financial condition of travel agents is declining and, if so, the effect of such a decline on consumers. It also will explore whether there are impediments to information regarding the services and products offered by the airline industry, and, if so, the effects of those impediments on travel agents, Internet-based distributors and consumers.

"The U.S. Department of Transportation has a continuing interest in the effects of airline marketing practices on travel agents, Internet-based distributors and consumers," said U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Y. Mineta. "I look forward to reading the commission's report."

A special focus of the study will be the competitive condition of smaller travel agencies – those with less than \$1 million in annual revenues. The commission will make recommendations on how to improve the condition of travel agents and enhance consumer access to travel information. It will issue its recommendations by Nov. 16.

The Secretary is authorized by AIR-21 to name three of the nine commissioners and to designate the commission's chair from among his three selections. The legislation specifically provides that the Secretary select a representative of the airline industry, a representative of the travel agent industry, and a Chairperson who would be independent of those industries. The Senate and House leadership is authorized to designate three commissioners each.

Secretary Mineta selected David L. Winstead, a Washington attorney and a former Maryland Secretary of Transportation, as the chair. Winstead is a former chairman of the Maryland Aviation Commission, and was President of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) in 1998. The Secretary also named Patrick V. Murphy, Jr., and Maryles Casto to serve on the commission. Murphy is a former Deputy Assistant Secretary for Aviation and International Affairs at the U.S. Department of Transportation, and is currently a principal at Gerchick-Murphy Associates, a Washington consulting firm. He currently represents United Airlines, JetBlue, and United Parcel Service. Casto is President and CEO of Casto Travel, Inc. of Santa Clara, CA, the largest travel agency in the Silicon Valley and one of the largest travel agencies in the United States.

The following commissioners have been appointed by members of Congress:

- Ted R. Lawson, President and CEO of National Travel, Inc. in Charleston, WV, appointed by Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle.
- Ann B. Mitchell, President and Owner of Carlson Wagonlit/Travel First, Inc. in Starkville, MS, appointed by Senate Minority Leader Trent Lott.
- Joyce Rogge, Senior Vice President-Marketing at Southwest Airlines in Dallas, appointed by Senator Lott.
- Paul M. Ruden, Senior Vice President for Legal and Industry Affairs for the American Society of Travel Agents in Washington, appointed by House Speaker Dennis Hastert.
- Gerald J. Roper, President and CEO of the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce, appointed by Speaker Hastert.
- Thomas P. Dunne, Sr., Chairman, CEO and President of the construction company Fred Weber, Inc., and a professional engineer in Maryland Heights, MO, appointed by House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt.

The commission will hold its first public hearing on Tuesday, June 11, at a place to be determined. The commission's offices are located in Washington at 1110 Vermont Ave. N.W., Suite 1160.

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