



## **Congress has once in a lifetime chance to fix our airports**

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January 10, 2017

President-elect Trump has complained about America's run down airports and the fact that airports in China and the Middle East are far superior to American airports, saying that when one lands at New York's LaGuardia Airport they feel like they have just landed in a "third world country." He has, in turn, promised a massive infrastructure bill that would partially address America's run down aviation infrastructure.

If Congress wants a roadmap for fixing our airports, it should look to a November report from the Heritage Foundation titled, "[Building on Victory: An Infrastructure Agenda for the New Administration](#)." The report, authored by Michael Sargent, made the case that airport funding "should be localized by eliminating the burdensome Airport Improvement Program and its related taxes while empowering airports to generate and spend their own revenues through airport user fees." Sargent argued that the U.S. airports should be run like a business with de minimis interference from the federal government.

When a consumer takes a trip to an airport, they are hammered with federal taxes then the subject of study by an army of TSA agents who have made air travel not so great again. Trump promised to lower taxes and one set of taxes that will spur a spike in air travel is the abolition of aviation taxes and the devolution of the tax collection to local airports. Those are ideas that could be adopted by Congress today and incorporated into legislation that would both improve infrastructure and lower the cost of travel for average Americans. User fees, not burdensome federal aviation taxes, are the answer.

The libertarian Cato Institute put out several proposals on the topic of privatizing U.S. airports. In a November paper authored by Robert W. Poole Jr. and Chris Edwards, the two argue that the government could "reduce federal intervention and move toward greater reliance on the private sector to fund, own, and operate the nation's infrastructure." Cato agrees with Heritage that user fees are a better way to fund aviation infrastructure. The Airport Improvement Program should be scrapped and airports should be moved towards privatization.

The core conservative idea that Congress and Trump need to keep front and center is shifting the system from a one size fits all massive federal tax on each ticket to a user fee system. Airports should collect fees to repair their own airports and moving to a privatized system would be preferable to the current system. The American people voted for change and one change that will make them very happy is to streamline the process of flying, with smart and less intrusive screening, and a tax system that lowers the cost of tickets while improving airport infrastructure. That type of a change to the system in an infrastructure bill would be a “win-win” for consumers of air travel.

Trump is committed to the idea of fixing our airports, so it becomes the job of Congress to craft the legislation that will both improve domestic airport infrastructure and help remove the tax distortions that hurt travel consumers. Pennsylvania Rep. Bill Schuster, as the Republican chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, will be the pilot of Trump’s legislation to improve America’s roads, bridges and airports.

Congress is set to have a once in a lifetime opportunity to fix our airports. It would behoove members to adhere to the plans that have been outlined by Heritage and Cato in their effort to make our airports “great again.”