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Worth being delayed for



Two consumer groups try to put brakes on "Hang-Up Act"

By

Mary Kirby

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Two consumer advocacy groups have asked Congress to commission a study on the use of wireless communications devices on US commercial flights before outlawing the in-flight use of mobile phones for voice calls and other wireless telephony. A study? A little bit of homework before making a permanent, broad-brush federal ban on in-flight mobile phone use (and VoIP)? Wouldn't that be nice.

The [Coalition for an Airline Passenger's Bill of Rights](#) (CAPBOR), a flyers' rights group, and the [Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council](#) (SBEC), which boasts a membership of over 70,000, have sent letters to US House transportation and infrastructure committee chairman James Oberstar and ranking member John Mica urging them to seek input from stakeholders and to consider all the information before banning the safe usage of wireless communications on US flights.

Thank heavens. For a minute there, I thought I was [one of the lone voices](#) on this subject. Now before you get your knickers in a knot, let me ask you a few questions. Do you really want the government outlawing technological advancement? Do you really want to live [in a nanny state](#) (not that we aren't making strides in other areas)? Do you really think it's fair that "wired" telephony is allowed but "wireless" telephony is not? If in-flight mobile phone usage hasn't been a problem in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, why on earth do you think it will be a problem here?

Key quote from CAPBOR executive director Kate Hanni:

"Given the increased difficulties we face in getting to our destinations these days Americans are spending more and more time at airports and on board commercial aircraft. We believe it is essential that the federal government perform a full inquiry before deciding whether to ban the use of wireless communications on commercial flights and that all the relevant benefits and information be considered before a decision is made by Congress."

SBE Council president and CEO Karen Kerrigan adds: "In today's ultra competitive global business climate, deals happen and commerce moves at the speed of the latest telecommunications technology - hours and even seconds count. By denying US passengers the ability to stay connected while on flights, while our international counterparts are able to do so, could create a significant disadvantage for US business travelers."

In-flight mobile phone use is [currently prohibited by the Federal Communications Commission](#) (FCC). In an effort to ensure that a permanent federal ban remains in place, Representative Peter DeFazio and other lawmakers last year introduced [the so-called "Hang-Up Act"](#) to prohibit wireless voice communications during flights, while ignoring wired voice communications. The bill's language was recently added to US FAA Reauthorization legislation being considered by the House.

"It makes good sense for Congress to take into consideration the available data, and the real world in-flight experiences of passengers and flight crews before moving to deny US passengers access to commonly used and valuable communication services," says Carl Biersack, spokesperson for the [In-flight Passenger Communications Commission](#) (IPCC), a group established by mobile connectivity providers AeroMobile and OnAir to stop the Hang-Up Act from becoming law.

Who else is involved in the IPCC? Panasonic, Inmarsat and Rockwell Collins.

The IPCC points out that, because in-flight communications have now been available to a wide range of passengers on commercial airline flights in Europe, Asia and the Middle East, "actual data is now available on usage, policies and procedures that have been enacted to facilitate their safe and courteous use".

I know my stance on this hasn't been very popular, but I take you back to the aforementioned questions. Does this legislation make sense in 2009? I think not.