



Examiner Local Editorial: Arrogant MWAA Board thumbs its nose at Congress

By: Examiner Editorial | 12/08/11 8:05 PM

When the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority Board went on record in September publicly opposing Rep. Frank Wolf's bill to increase Virginia's representation, board members demonstrated their arrogance and utter lack of accountability to the public. Now that Virginia Republican's legislation has been passed by Congress and signed by President Obama, MWAA's obstinate refusal to obey federal law underscores the necessity of reining in this out-of-control quasigovernmental entity.

The new law expands the board from 13 to 17 members, adding two more members from Virginia, and one each from D.C. and Maryland. Virginia still lacks a board majority even though both airports MWAA runs are in the commonwealth, but it does help counteract the current imbalance. Nevertheless, citing the interstate compact that created MWAA in 1987, the board refused to seat Gov. Bob McDonnell's two new appointees, going so far as to seek outside legal counsel to decipher "the intent of Congress."

"Contrary to what your board believes, the intent of Congress could not be more clear," Wolf said in a stinging reply to MWAA Board Chairman Charles Snelling. That intent is embodied in the federal law, which also requires board members to step down as soon as their six-year terms expire. Prompted by the absurdity of allowing a board member whose term had expired to cast a decisive proxy vote while under house arrest in the Ivory Coast, the law also permits the removal of sitting members "for cause." That proxy vote was okay with MWAA -- but not a vote by McDonnell appointees Todd Stottlemyer or Caren Merrick? Meanwhile, MWAA allowed other members with expired terms to vote in clear disregard of congressional intent.

The federal government originally built Ronald Reagan Washington National and Washington Dulles International airports and still holds title. Congressional authorization was needed to transfer the land to MWAA under a 50-year lease (later extended to 80 years). Accepting MWAA's assertion that it does not have to obey federal law until the various legislatures amend their interstate compact means accepting the illogical conclusion that the compact somehow supersedes federal law, which authorized its existence in the first place. The MWAA Board is thumbing its nose at Congress precisely when it's concurrently seeking federal funding to prevent "heartburn level" tolls on the Dulles Toll Road to pay for Phase 2 of Dulles Rail, one more reason the current board is in urgent need of new faces.

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