

WASHINGTON – Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (NY-28) invited executives from Western New York-area businesses to the Department of Transportation yesterday in an effort to reduce airline prices in and out of the Rochester and Buffalo airports noting that with better transportation options comes a more vibrant local economy.

Slaughter started the conversation between the business leaders and US Airways. She was joined by Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood.

“Rochester and Buffalo are home to extraordinary corporations and world-class research institutions. I know that they need access to our nation’s capital to make sure they have access to federal grants and the agencies that allow them to thrive. Right now exorbitant flight costs are impeding them and that’s a problem,” said Slaughter. “Reliable and affordable transportation options are vital to our local economy. It allows the businesses we have to grow and gives us a powerful recruitment tool in bringing the businesses of tomorrow to our hometown.”

Following the meeting, local business leaders pledged to continue talking with the airline.

“I’m pleased that this conversation will continue between the Western New York business community and I thank U.S. Air for their willingness to discuss the vital matter,” said Slaughter.

“A persistent issue of concern we hear from our members is the high cost of airfare to select locations,” said Sandra Parker, President and CEO of the Rochester Business Alliance. “While great strides have been made over the past decade in expanding the mix of carriers at Rochester International Airport and reducing airfares to a number of destinations through increased competition, employers are still paying exorbitant fees to fly to Washington. I believe that increased competition will lower airfares and increase passenger traffic helping not only the Greater Rochester employer community, but US Airways as well.”

Slaughter has been a champion of low-cost airlines coming into Rochester and Buffalo. Nearly ten years ago she helped JetBlue acquire slots needed to fly between Upstate New York and New York City. This lowered fares in Upstate overnight, launched JetBlue, and convinced other low-cost carriers to serve our region. And ushered in other low-cost carriers like AirTran. In January, Slaughter wrote a letter to Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood and Federal Aviation Administrator Randy Babbitt asking that Washington's Reagan National Airport be required to hold more flight slots for low-cost carriers like AirTran, JetBlue and Southwest, resulting in a deal that required more slots for low-cost carriers.

### **What local business leaders are saying about the cost of airfare**

“As the largest employer in the Rochester region and the sixth largest employer in New York State with thousands of students, faculty, and staff that regularly travel to our nation's capital to conduct business with federal agencies, the Congress, and other DC-based organizations, I am greatly concerned about the cost of airfares for travel to and from Ronald Reagan National Airport. Although travel between Rochester and Dulles International Airport, as well as Baltimore-Washington International Airport, can be less expensive, it is not the most convenient nor the most conducive for business. I want to thank Congresswoman Slaughter for continuing to champion this critical issue. Improving service, providing better access and lowering fares can serve as a significant public benefit that will strengthen our institution and help facilitate economic growth in the region.”

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*President*

*University of Rochester*

“PAETEC has grown over the past twelve years to a nationwide company with offices in 84 of the top 100 cities in the United States. I truly believe that a large factor in our success is fostering a customer and employee-focused culture. I've found that face-to-face interactions with employees and customers pays dividends that are beyond measure. However, keeping this level of personal attention is difficult in a city like Rochester given the relatively high airfares when compared to other cities around the nation. As we grow, we have opportunities to grow our new positions virtually anywhere in the nation like Chicago, Dallas or Atlanta. But with new positions which require considerable travel, it makes financial sense for us to consider the city's average airfares. We would rather that airfare not be a factor when making these decisions.”

*Arunas A. Chesonis*

*Chairman and CEO*

*PAETEC Holding Corp.*

“As you know, our company is the world's leading wine company and our global headquarters, and one of our major wineries is in the Rochester area. Since airlines moved to the hub system over the years for various reasons, it presents challenges for business travelers if they are based near a small regional airport. Many routes now require connections, presenting additional travel time. I travel to and from ROC and DCA routinely and have noted sometimes I am forced to pay over \$1,200 for a return trip and if I have taken the same plane that I got off in DCA and continued on to Florida, the total trip would be almost two thirds less! We also have some of our employees driving to BUF to take JET Blue to Boston because the difference in cost is \$.44 per mile for USAirways from ROC vs \$.20 on Jet Blue from BUF.”

*James P. Finkle*

*Senior Vice President of External Affairs*

*Constellation Brands, Inc.*

“To put it directly, the air service between Rochester and key destinations such as Washington DC and Albany is inadequate and often leaves us with our backs against the wall with no alternative other than the more costly option (for example, to be at a meeting in Washington before 10 a.m. the only way to make it is to fly into Reagan or go the evening before and stay over, thereby incurring high hotel costs). RIT has a number of faculty and others who receive federal grants from various agencies. These grants require periodic trips to and from DC to report on programs and grant progress. We also have faculty who participate on review panels for these agencies, a very important part of competitive grant programs and a process that is of mutual benefit to the agency and to RIT in learning more about what makes grant applications competitive. I'm sure, though, that there have been occasions where faculty have had to decline these opportunities due to the cost of airfare and the limited flight options which makes it difficult to work around their academic teaching schedules. This is a loss for both parties involved.

And as you know, RIT is home to the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, a federally sponsored program. Because of its statutory authorization as part of the Department of Education budget, NTID must have representatives in DC on a regular basis for meetings with members of Congress, including testimony and other meetings with its oversight committees

and congressional staff. In addition, NTID is frequently called upon to provide its expertise on deafness-related issues, not only in DC but other areas of the country. Last year alone, NTID staff and faculty had at least 60 trips to Washington, DC.”

*William W. Destler, Ph.D.*

*President*

*Rochester Institute of Technology*

“Due to the nature of business conducted by Harris Corporation’s RF Communications Division's frequent travel between ROC and DCA is required. However, due to the high cost of air travel a significant portion of travel between Upstate New York and Washington D.C. does not occur. High airfares between ROC and DCA put a significant financial strain on local businesses and make it more difficult for companies based in Upstate New York to be competitive in a global economy. Were airline fares between ROC and DCA reduced Harris employees would take advantage of those rates by increasing travel and ultimately sustaining lower nonstop airline fares.”

*Dana Mehnert Group President, RF Communications  
Harris Corporation*

“As the leader of an organization with a tightening budget, I can say that travel is one of the first categories looked at for reductions. However, participation in national discussions through associations, committees and advisory boards requires travel all over the country and is important to Roswell Park for the enhancement and cultivation of our national reputation and recruitment of physician and research talent. Additionally, our clinical expertise and innovative programs will draw patients from around the country, but only if patients are able to get here at a reasonable cost. As a leader of a major employer in the Buffalo Niagara region, it is my hope that some actions can be taken to make airfare more competitive and convenient.”

*Dona  
Id L. Trump, MD, FACP*

*President and CEO*

*Roswell Park Cancer Institute*