

D/FW Airport supporters await possible impact of Wright amendment's end



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On Oct. 13, the Wright amendment ends.

That law, enacted in 1980, put limits on airlines flying out of Dallas Love Field. Carriers flying aircraft with more than 56 seats could not offer nonstop or through service beyond nearby states.

But Dallas and Fort Worth officials, Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport and the airlines agreed in 2006 to let the law expire this year. With that, Southwest Airlines and other carriers can fly from Love to any U.S. airport.

But how big an effect will that new freedom at Love have on D/FW Airport? Before the 2006 deal, the predictions were harrowing.

"With repeal of the Wright amendment, D/FW Airport could lose up to 204 daily flights and up to 21 million passengers annually," consultants SH&E warned.

Now, though, any warnings aren't nearly as dire. In recent interviews, North Texas economists played down any major harm to the larger airport.

"I don't think the repeal of the Wright amendment is going to be any big whoop," Bernard Weinstein, associate director of Southern Methodist University's Maguire Energy Institute, said in a recent interview.

Aviation consultant Michael Boyd, who has studied the Love Field-D/FW issue for decades, also sees little impact from the end of the Wright amendment. At worst, D/FW Airport will lose only 4 percent of its traffic, Boyd predicted.

"It's not going to be real busy down there. Some traffic will divert, but not a lot," said Boyd, president of Boyd Group International of Evergreen, Colo.

Southwest, which will control 16 of 20 gates at Love Field's new concourse, is spending the months leading up to the law's expiration drumming up excitement. But its ability to attract many more passengers is likely to depend on what fares it can profitably offer.

With Southwest's costs going up in recent years, its ability to undercut others' fares is not what it was in 2006. And Spirit Airlines Inc., which has grown rapidly at D/FW Airport, has become a lower low-fare carrier than Southwest.

Still, Terry L. Clower, a University of North Texas economist, said increased competition on certain routes should lead to "some lower prices than we have seen."

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Here's a link to another column by Dr. Bernard Weinstein, carrying the title: "Is Southwest a White Knight or a Black Widow?": <http://www.dallasblog.com/20060307405255/guest-viewpoints-2/is-southwest-a--white-knight-or-a-black-widow-by-dr.-bernard-l.-weinstein.html>

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["I don't think the repeal of the Wright amendment is going to be any big whoop," Bernard Weinstein, associate director of Southern Methodist University's Maguire Energy Institute, said in a recent interview.]

Bernard Weinstein's a funny guy--- he seems to change his opinions based on prevailing sentiment.

Here's a direct quote from Dr. Weinstein contained in a press release issued by DFW Airport on November 10, 2005:

"The ideal solution would be to close Love Field to scheduled air service. Barring that, keeping the Wright Amendment in place is the 'second best' policy."

One of the problems I've had over the years with the DMN's coverage of aviation matters in North Texas is that the DMN has frequently reported simply absurd statements issued by various political leaders without any skepticism-- their words are simply parroted in the articles. Many times, the statements are easily disprovable as false, yet the DMN never takes the obvious step of pointing that out. At other times, as is in this story, the DMN provides a forum for various holders of influence (such as Dr. Weinstein) to take positions that are diametrically opposed to their prior statements--- yet no efforts are made to point out the contradictions.

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