

Shuster lounges poolside with airline lobbyists as he pursues FAA bill

It's the latest example of the Transportation Committee chairman's coziness with the airline industry.

By Anna Palmer, Jake Sherman and John Bresnahan, Politico.com | 02/23/16



House Transportation Committee Chairman Rep. Bill Shuster (left), accompanied by House Speaker Paul Ryan, speaks during a news conference on Capitol Hill Nov. 3, 2015. | AP Photo

On Feb. 10, Nick Calio, head of the nation's top airline trade group, Airlines for America, testified before Rep. Bill Shuster's House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. The topic was a top priority for both men: A bill to overhaul the Federal Aviation Administration, most controversially by putting air traffic control in the hands of an entity favorable to the airlines.

Two days later, Shuster's committee approved the measure. And the week after that, he and Calio escaped to Miami Beach, Florida, with Shelley Rubino, an Airlines for America vice president who is Shuster's girlfriend.

The three lounged by the pool and dined together during festivities tied to Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart's (R-Fla.) annual weekend fundraising trip. Attendees said they looked as if they were traveling in a pack.

It's the most recent example of Shuster's cozy relationship with the powerful airline association. His panel has jurisdiction over the \$160 billion U.S. airline industry.

The FAA bill is critical to the Pennsylvania Republican's legacy, and to Airlines for America's members, which include every major airline and cargo carrier in the country except Delta Air Lines. Calio testified that modernizing the air-traffic control system would provide an "immense benefit" to the airlines and their customers.

The bill would spin off the nation's air-traffic control apparatus into a nonprofit company. The airline industry would have more representation than any other industry on the entity's board. Pilots would also get a seat, handing the airlines effective control of the air-traffic control system. Regional airlines, which operate roughly half of the nation's flights, would have no representation on the board.

Shuster's office did not reply to multiple requests for comment about who paid for the trip or whether it was appropriate to associate so closely with top representatives for the airline industry at the same time the FAA bill is under consideration in Congress.

In an April Politico story detailing Shuster's relationship with Rubino, the eight-term congressman insisted that the couple did not mix business and professional issues. Shuster said his office "has in place a policy that deals with personal relationships that cover my staff and myself. This was created in consultation with legal counsel and goes further than is required by the law. Under that policy, Ms. Rubino doesn't lobby my office, including myself and my staff."

Last year, Shuster revived a long-stalled priority of the airline industry that allowed airline companies to advertise the price of a ticket without including fees and taxes. Shuster's close ties to the industry have been an issue in his primary campaign this year against Art Halvorson, who lost to Shuster in 2014 and is trying to oust him again.

A4A, meanwhile, said Shuster and Calio have "known each other for decades."

"Mr. Calio frequently attends Republican [and Democratic] fundraising trips, and it is not unusual that they would be at the same work-related political event," said A4A spokeswoman Jean Medina in a statement. "Chairman Shuster has been a leader on driving change as part of the FAA reauthorization process, for the good of the economy and the traveling and shipping public, not for any one entity, and to suggest otherwise is highly inappropriate."

Several lobbyists on the fundraising trip were taken aback by the closeness displayed by Shuster, Calio and Rubino as they mingled at the Shelbourne Wyndham Grand hotel on posh Collins Avenue in South Beach. These sources requested anonymity, not wanting to antagonize a powerful committee chairman and the largest airline lobby.

Multiple attendees said the trio spent much of the trip together, hanging out poolside on deck chairs in front of a cabana that was rented for the weekend fundraiser. The three also took a private shuttle organized by Calio with others to a dinner Saturday night at Garcia's Seafood Grille & Fish Market, a well-known Cuban restaurant in Miami, the sources said.

The airlines' favorable treatment in the FAA bill hasn't gone unnoticed.

At the hearing where Calio testified, several transportation committee members criticized the proposed makeup of the 11-member nonprofit board that would oversee air-traffic control, saying it should include slots for regional airlines or consumer representatives.

“We’ve got basically four [airlines] now, and if they’re going to run this FAA, I don’t think the consumer is going to get the right representation on that board,” Alaska GOP Rep. Don Young said.

Calio countered at the hearing: “Well, to many people, two general aviation [spots] seems like an awful lot, given the use of the airspace and who pays what for the airspace. ... Frankly, we thought we should’ve had more seats.”

At a committee markup on the bill the next day, the panel approved an amendment adding two seats to the nonprofit company’s board — one for aerospace manufacturers and the other for the business aviation industry. The airlines retained their four seats.

Advancing the FAA bill has not been easy and it faces a number of obstacles to get through Congress. First, Shuster agreed to practically exempt much of Alaska’s air-traffic control apparatus from the bill after Young, a former transportation committee chairman, threatened to vote against the bill. Almost every House and Senate appropriator opposes the measure because of concerns that the air-traffic control plan would shift spending power away from Capitol Hill.

The bill was expected on the floor this week, but a vote has been delayed as further changes are required to gain support.

Heather Caygle contributed to this report.

Copied 2/23/2016 from: <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/02/bill-shuster-faa-bill-airline-lobbyists-219666>
(Highlights, footnotes and minor edits may have been added by aiREFORM)

17 Comments



Peter Tenny

Just another high paid whore!!!!

Like · Reply ·  6 · 3 hrs



Ray Lothbrooke ·

Georgetown University

You are disgusting.

Like · Reply · 2 hrs



Robert Evans ·

Chula Vista, California

Ray Lothbrooke

Nope, he's right.

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Georgetown University

Robert Evans Wow.

Like · Reply · 1 hr



Michael Kelly ·

University of Washington

What a crook

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Heinrich Wald

Republicanism at its finest. Let the deflection begin.

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Def Blynd

Is he a Republican? Just askin'. That should a great reminder at the voting booth in November.

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Leroy Jackson ·

School of Hard Knocks, The University of Life

His party affiliation wasn't stated by Politico. So that means he's a Demorat.

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Leroy Jackson You might want to read the article again. It clearly states he is a republican.

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Craig Finch - He's a Republican....the ability to read is optional.

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Kelvin Pearce Jr. ·

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Leroy Jackson This guy.

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Trudy Vittozzi Edler ·

Saint Leo University

Leroy Jackson Nope, previous articles identified him as a repub. This is not the first article on the creep!

Like · Reply · 1 hr



Alan Williams ·

Cleveland, Ohio

Leroy Jackson: The article does state that he is a Republican. Optionally, you could highlight his name, right-click and select the option to "Search Google for..". That takes minimal effort so it is probably off your list of options.

Like · Reply · 1 hr



Dick Diamond

Yes, the Chairman of the committee that oversees the Airlines.

Like · Reply · 1 hr



Chris Fischahs ·

Naval Academy

Another example of The Establishment which doesn't care for the people. This is the problem.
Signed, A Republican Voter

Like · Reply ·  2 · 3 hrs



Scott Henricks ·

Mound, Minnesota

The only problem is they're ALL "establishment". Once the primary is over they all fly off to Washington to wallow in the same trough to raise campaign cash just like their "establishment" predecessor.

Like · Reply ·  2 · 2 hrs



Dick Diamond

Against a Republican Chair? That IS telling. "mad as hell and not going to take it any more."

Like · Reply · 1 hr



Jeffrey Lewis ·

Oregon State University

Good for you, speaking up against corruption without muffling yourself due to party allegiance. I found it fitting that the ads attached to this article (at least on my computer) were for the equivalent establishment where in the pretend other party: HRC.

Let's hope this is the year that we can break the wasteful cronyistic mudhole brought to us by the entrenched Dem/GOP duopoly.

Like · Reply · 4 mins



Tiana Kutuzov ·

Detroit, Michigan

this is why trump is winning.

Like · Reply ·  1 · 2 hrs



Thom Mongelli ·

Works at Retired

Really...because he isn't corrupt? Lol!

Like · Reply · 2 hrs



Thom Mongelli ·

Works at Retired

They don't even try to hide the corruption...I guess repubes think they are Teflon.

Like · Reply · 2 hrs



Robert Evans ·

Chula Vista, California

At this point they are. Since Congress makes it's own rules, nothing can be done short of a recall in this guy's home state.

Like · Reply · 2 hrs

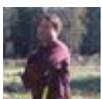


Thom Mongelli ·

Works at Retired

Robert Evans I guess.

Like · Reply · 1 hr



Jeffrey Lewis ·

Oregon State University

Robert Evans True. A funny detail is Bill is on the same corruption track as his dad, Bud. Same power position, too. Bud got busted, but the congressional investigation dragged on for years, then he was simply reprimanded based on a 1,092 page report (I kid you not). There is zero accountability in Congress, hence the stupidity demonstrated during hearings, talking to the press, etc. We would be so, SOOOOO, much better off if terms were limited to ONE and a rule no other federal elected offices in that body after the one term. Long overdue this change.

Like · Reply · Just now



Ray Lothbrooke ·

Georgetown University

Whatever...

Like · Reply · 2 hrs



Ray Lothbrooke ·

Georgetown University

The "Source" to this story is US Travel - the "Sponsor" of Politico Transportation. Follow the money... POLITICO a "pay to write" Journalistic ethical train wreck.

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Robert Evans ·

Chula Vista, California

Maybe, but is the story true?

Like · Reply · 2 hrs



Robert Evans ·

Chula Vista, California

You know, this is why Americans of all political stripes are incensed with Congress. This sort of crap is business as usual back there and the game has been rigged to let these hacks get away with it. Do we need a Constitutional Convention to remedy this and all the other ills that Congress has given us?

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Bill Wilde

Another crooked bastard, Schuster.
What a scumbag. Him and his slut.

Like · Reply · 2 hrs



Ray Lothbrooke ·

Georgetown University

Hi Art Halvorson - Is this your FB Alias? nice language.

Like · Reply · 1 hr



GA Watch

I donno who is the bigger whore here..Shuster or Rubino ? And the Airlines are the pimp.
The in your face corruption and shamelessness here is mind boggling.

Like · Reply · 1 hr



Trudy Vittozzi Edler ·

Saint Leo University

What a fkng SLUG!!

Like · Reply · 1 hr



Dick Diamond

This is just another example of the Big Corporations having the government of the United States in their pocket. It isn't "We the people. . ." It's "We the Corporate State. . ." a politically correct term for FASCISM ala Mussolini in Italy. Pathetic. Tragic. Not the American government I loved and taught about for 40 years. It's not your father's or grandfather's government. It's this age of youth which is more interested in "me" than "we"

Like · Reply · 1 hr



Dick Diamond

And you wonder why Trump is leading? America is getting more and more angry. "Mad as hell and not going to take it any more." Words of Harold Beale from the film "Network," in 1976.

Like · Reply · 1 hr



Dick Diamond

As the Republican chairman of the committee, you can only imagine in your worst nightmare what it will be like with a Republican Congress including the Senate and a Republican President. Yikes!

Like · Reply · 1 hr



Ian Leipper ·

Works at Self-Employed

For a complete record from the government and our international community, you can serve a civil subpoena duces tecum upon a court of justice in accordance with the instructions provided on my facebook profile, starting at the top of the wall and working through each post and reply. Help hold the politicians accountable with discovery and make some money as reparations for civil violations against you and your communities: www.facebook.com/ileipper

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