

Congress passes bill boosting pilots' rights

WASHINGTON (AP) - Pilots' rights when dealing with Federal Aviation Administration disciplinary proceedings would receive a boost under a bill passed by Congress on Monday - a measure written by a senator who was ordered to take remedial flying lessons by the agency after he landed his plane on a closed runway.

The House approved the bill by voice vote. The Senate approved the measure last month. The bill now goes to the president for his signature.

The bill was sponsored by Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., who sent workers on the ground scrambling when he landed his plane on a closed runway marked with a giant yellow X at an airport in South Texas in October 2010. Inhofe said later he didn't see the workers and trucks on the runway until it was too late to safely abort the landing. The FAA didn't post a notice online warning pilots of the runway closure until days after the incident, he said.

Afterward, FAA officials ordered Inhofe, who has been flying for more than 50 years, to take remedial training as a condition for retaining his license. The senator complained he wasn't treated fairly by the agency and the process left him feeling powerless.

The bill requires the FAA to provide pilots with timely notice of actions that might affect their license. Pilots also could appeal FAA decisions in federal court if a first appeal to the National Transportation Safety Board fails.

The bill also clarifies what information the FAA must provide pilots when the agency issues orders that deny, amend, modify, suspend, or revoke a license. FAA would also be required to improve its program for notifying pilots of changes or events that could affect their flight plans, such as closed runways.

FAA officials didn't reply to a request for comment.

The bill was supported by the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association and the Experimental Aircraft Association, the two largest groups representing private pilots.

"Over the course of my years in Congress, I have helped an untold number of pilots facing the pressure of dealing with the FAA," Inhofe said in a statement. "This bill remedies many of the most serious deficiencies in the relationship between general aviation and the FAA, and ensures that pilots are, like everyone else, treated in a fair and equitable manner by the justice system."

Read more: <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2012/07/23/congress-passes-bill-boosting-pilots-rights/#ixzz21XkW03yG>