

Senate Joint Resolution No. 21—Committee on

Legislative Affairs and Operations

FILE NUMBER.....

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION—Expressing concern regarding proposals redefining the space in which an aircraft may be flown over the Grand Canyon.

WHEREAS, Tourism is the mainstay of the Nevada economy; and

WHEREAS, The air tour industry is an exciting and strong attraction for visitors to Southern Nevada; and

WHEREAS, Air tours over the Grand Canyon have been a tourism tradition for more than 70 years and this industry has maintained a strong safety record; and

WHEREAS, Approximately 800,000 visitors from around the world enjoyed air tours of the Grand Canyon in 1996 and 500,000 of those visitors originated their flights in Southern Nevada; and

WHEREAS, Air tours are the only way that persons who have certain physical disabilities can experience the grandeur of the Grand Canyon; and

WHEREAS, In 1996, a study conducted by the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, estimated that air tourism to the Grand Canyon using Southern Nevada air tour operators contributed more than \$374.8 million to the Southern Nevada economy; and

WHEREAS, The study concluded that the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority generates air tour industry expenditures of \$49.8 million each year; and

WHEREAS, The study determined that more than 142,000 foreign visitors, which constitutes 32.4 percent of all foreign visitors, and more than 9,000 visitors from the United States, which constitutes 23.7 percent of all visitors from within the United States, would forego visits to Southern Nevada if the Grand Canyon air tours were unavailable; and

WHEREAS, Recent economic downturns in Asia have adversely impacted tourism in Southern Nevada; and

WHEREAS, The air tour industry provides visual access to back country of the Grand Canyon including many of its most spectacular sights, and without air tours, only a small minority of visitors who have the time and physical ability to hike in the canyon would be afforded the opportunity to appreciate these magnificent sights; and

WHEREAS, Air tours do not cause a permanent negative impact on the fragile environment of the Grand Canyon as do some other activities; and

WHEREAS, In 1988, Special Federal Aviation Regulation 50-2 was enacted establishing routes, altitudes and reporting requirements and as a result of this legislation, noise complaints have been dramatically reduced and there has been a substantial restoration of natural quiet to the Grand Canyon; and

WHEREAS, Since the enactment of the requirements of this regulation, 92 percent of visitors to the park have reported that they were not adversely affected by aircraft sounds, and visitors to the back country have reported seeing or hearing only one or two aircraft a day; and

WHEREAS, The United States Forest Service concluded in 1992 that there were "few adverse impacts to wilderness users" from aircraft tours and that the flights did not impair the overall enjoyment of the wilderness or reduce the likelihood of repeat visits; and

WHEREAS, A hearing held on September 2, 1998, by the House National Parks and Public Lands Subcommittee disclosed that the National Park Service noise analysis failed to undergo scientific modeling or peer review; and

WHEREAS, The National Park Service disclosed on February 2, 1999, its intention to redefine the threshold for substantial restoration of natural quiet in the air tour air space of Grand Canyon National Park at a noticeability level of 8 decibels below natural ambient air sound; and

WHEREAS, Air tour operators and acoustical experts conclude that this higher threshold proposed by the National Park Service would virtually shut down air tours in the east end air space of the Grand Canyon National Park; and

WHEREAS, The Federal Aviation Administration now proposes to conduct an environmental assessment of air routes from Las Vegas to the Grand Canyon based solely on sound that could lead to further restriction or capping of flights; and

WHEREAS, The Nevada Congressional Delegation, the Nevada Commission on Tourism, the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority and McCarran International Airport repeatedly have supported maintaining a viable Southern Nevada air tour industry and continued air access to and from Las Vegas; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED BY THE SENATE AND ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF NEVADA, JOINTLY, That the Nevada Legislature expresses its concern regarding any proposal to redefine the space in which aircraft may be flown over the Grand Canyon and urges the Congress of the United States to effect an outcome for the Southern Nevada air tour industry that will protect, support and sustain the viability of this significant contributor to the tourism economy of the State of Nevada and the enjoyment of visitors and sightseers; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the Secretary of the Senate prepare and transmit a copy of this resolution to the Vice President of the United States as presiding officer of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, each member of the Nevada Congressional Delegation, the Grand Canyon Air Tour Council and the United States Air Tour Association; and be it further

RESOLVED, That this resolution becomes effective upon passage and approval.