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FedEx delivery switch would sink seafood industry

By Bob Jones

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Florida's seafood industry is greatly concerned about pending legislation in Congress that has the potential to harm our state's businesses, economy and consumers. Buried in Section 806, a provision of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2009 would change the regulatory status of FedEx Express — the world's largest airline — to mirror UPS, a predominantly ground delivery service.

This provision alters FedEx Express' fundamental labor structure by governing FedEx Express, an express delivery company, as a trucking company by moving its regulatory status from the Railway Labor Act to the National Labor Relations Act. This change would cripple the company's reliability by causing massive disruptions in our nation's delivery system — disruptions Congress worked to avoid by putting express companies under the RLA. Our industry depends on overnight delivery to maintain the integrity of our fresh seafood products.

FedEx has redefined the package delivery system, establishing overnight accountability in an economy where businesses count on parts and inventory, consumers demand consistent, reliable, affordable service, and communities rely on jobs created both directly and indirectly as a result of a FedEx presence. The proposed provision threatens the reliability of our nation's overnight delivery system by exposing the company to system-wide operational interruptions — stranding workers' paychecks and essential goods on shipping docks across the country.

What will happen under the proposed change to our seafood industry? Shipping costs will go up. Delivery routes will close. Delivery options will decrease, making three-, four- or even 10-day service the best available in some areas, especially Florida's rural coasts. Florida's seafood industry can't afford to take a step back in terms of what we can offer our customers. And our economy can't afford to take the hit that would result from changes in the supply chain for FedEx, or for businesses and industries that rely on FedEx.

Lawmakers need to understand the big picture and oppose the FAA Reauthorization bill unless this language is removed. This issue is about more than just delivering packages. It's about supporting healthy enterprise at a time when the health of our economy and our businesses needs all the help it can get.

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