

Bill Would Hurt Smith Reynolds, Some Say

County May Help Oversee Regional Airport

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Staff Reporters

RALEIGH — Winston-Salem and Forsyth County would gain a foothold in overseeing the Regional Airport outside Greensboro under a bill filed yesterday by Sen. Ted Kaplan, D-Forsyth, for introduction in the General Assembly today.

But some partisans of Winston-Salem's Smith Reynolds Airport are warning that such a bill could strike the final blow against airline service there.

Kaplan's bill would place two new members on the Greensboro-High Point Airport Authority who must be residents of the airport's Federal Aviation Administration assigned service area — more than 20 counties stretching from Burlington

and Salisbury to Northwestern North Carolina and south-central Virginia.

After the bill is introduced today, Kaplan said, he will ask to have it amended to specify that the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners and the Winston-Salem Board of Aldermen each have the right to appoint one of the two new authority members.

The bill cannot take that form originally because of an April 15 deadline for introducing legislation affecting particular cities and counties.

The Airport Authority now has two members appointed by the Greensboro City Council, two appointed by the High Point City Council and one appointed by the Guilford County Board of Commissioners.

All four other senators who represent the two affected counties — Marvin Ward, D-Forsyth, Robert G. Shaw, R-Guilford, Wendell H. Sawyer, R-Guilford, and William N. Martin, D-Guilford — have agreed to co-sponsor the bill.

The Regional Airport authority has invited government and civic leaders from Forsyth and Guilford counties to discuss it during an 8 a.m. breakfast meeting Saturday at the Airport Marriot Hotel.

Kaplan said that leaders of the Greater Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce have told him that they back the bill.

But members of the Airport Commission of Forsyth County, the Forsyth County commissioners and Winston-Salem Mayor Wayne A. Corpening appear reluctant to support it, he said.

He said that some local officials are worried that the bill could cause further reductions in scheduled airline service at Smith Reynolds Airport.

That, in turn, would reduce Smith Reynolds' share of a federal airport improvements fund that is raised through a tax on airline tickets and allocated according to the number of passengers who board at each airport.

Sunbird Airlines is the only remaining commercial airline at Smith Reynolds. Piedmont Airlines discontinued its service there in October 1983.

Kenneth D. Cox, president of the Smith Reynolds Airport's Air Service Improvements Task Force, said he thinks the issue of Forsyth County representation at the

See Bill, Page 16

Bill May Hurt City Airport, Critics Say

Continued From Page 13

Regional Airport "just about needs to be put to a public vote in our county."

Cox, who opposes the move, said that officials should "give the public a chance to hear both sides of the story."

"Let's let the county hear the task force's reason why it shouldn't be done, and let the chamber (of commerce) promote the reason that it should be done."

Charles Webb, executive vice president of the Greater Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce, said, "The chamber has very clearly said that one of its priorities for 1985-1986 is to seek representation on the Regional Airport authority."

"But we have not endorsed or asked for this particular legislation; we will be looking at it," he said.

Forsyth County Commissioner David L. Drummond said, "I see no reason why we shouldn't have an opportunity to have someone on that (Regional Airport) board. I certainly feel that we should have representation, if at all possible."

"My thoughts are simply that we need to recognize that the Greensboro-Triad airport is the passenger airport for Winston-Salem now," he said.

Richard V. Linville, chairman of the Board of Commissioners, said, "I wouldn't make any commitment one way or the other until I learn more about the situation."

He said that the commissioners would discuss the matter at their 2 p.m. briefing session today at the Hall of Justice.

Kaplan said that local opposition to cooperating with the Regional Airport authority is shortsighted.

He said that airport officials have told him that more than 30 percent of the Regional Airport's passengers come from Forsyth County and that the percentage might grow if the airport begins international service in the next few years.

"If that's the case, we ought to be participating," Kaplan said. "You have some people out there that are more concerned with preserving their positions than with helping Forsyth County. It appears to me that there's not a great deal of foresight."

Although his bill does not address the issue, Kaplan said that he thinks the Triad would benefit by eventually having just one airport authority to operate both the Regional Airport and Smith Reynolds.

Nevertheless, Kaplan said, he will ask that no action be taken on his bill until Forsyth County officials reach a consensus.