

Renaming airport causes con

WASHINGTON (AP) — A bill to rename Washington's airport for Ronald Reagan is on its way to becoming law just in time for his 87th birthday — despite complaints from Democrats that Congress is trampling local rights.

President Clinton will sign the bill, said spokesperson Mike McCurry, because "I think for him it came down to a question of honoring Ronald Reagan."

The Senate passed one bill Wednesday to rename Washington National Airport the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, 76-22. Later in the day, the House approved a slightly different bill, 240-186, leaving out the word "Washington." The House was expected to adopt the Senate's version today, the eve of Reagan's birthday.

House Speaker Newt Gingrich praised the renaming as a fitting tribute to an ailing president "who transformed the world" by helping bring down inflation and end the Cold War.

"I hope that the president and Mrs. Reagan, watching this happen, will have some small sense that there is enormous affection in this country for Ronald Reagan, and there is a deep sense of gratitude for the leadership that he showed," Gingrich said.

"Ronald Reagan is the most

loved man in America today" said House Majority Leader Dick Armey. Reagan suffers from Alzheimer's disease.

Despite the outpouring of sentiment, opponents of the bill promised a court challenge. Rep. James P. Moran, Jr., who represents the Northern Virginia district where the airport is located, said changing the name would cost the businesses in and around it hundreds of thousands of dollars to change signs and stationery.

"It is unprecedented to rename a facility ... in the jurisdiction of a member of this Congress when that member opposes that name," Moran said in a floor speech. "If we do this it will be an arrogant abuse of power, it will be partisan, and it will be wrong."

Several lawmakers and union members also said there must be more fitting tributes for a leader who fired 11,000 striking air traffic controllers, presided over a ballooning national debt and championed local control over projects.

"How ironic that in the name of Ronald Reagan, we would do the very thing that he opposed the most," said Daschle, of South Dakota.

In the House, Democrat David Obey of Wisconsin proposed that instead of the office that deals with debt should be renamed "the Ronald Reagan Bureau of Public Debt."

Randy Schwitz, executive director of the Air Traffic Association, said he would sue when he heard Congress was considering naming the airport after Reagan.

"Ronald Reagan never did anything for aviation in this country," Schwitz, whose group represents 14,700 air traffic controllers, said in a telephone interview. "Congress salt in the wound."

But others scolded chiefly Democrats for the belated honor.

"The purpose of honoring a great American who is in the event said Judiciary Committee member Henry Hyde of Illinois honor for him has been a victim of what we call petty politics."

Neither Reagan nor his son, who was as he said that his father "honored" by the name.



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