CONGRESSMAN LOSES BATTLE IN WAR ON SHRINKING AIRLINE SEATS

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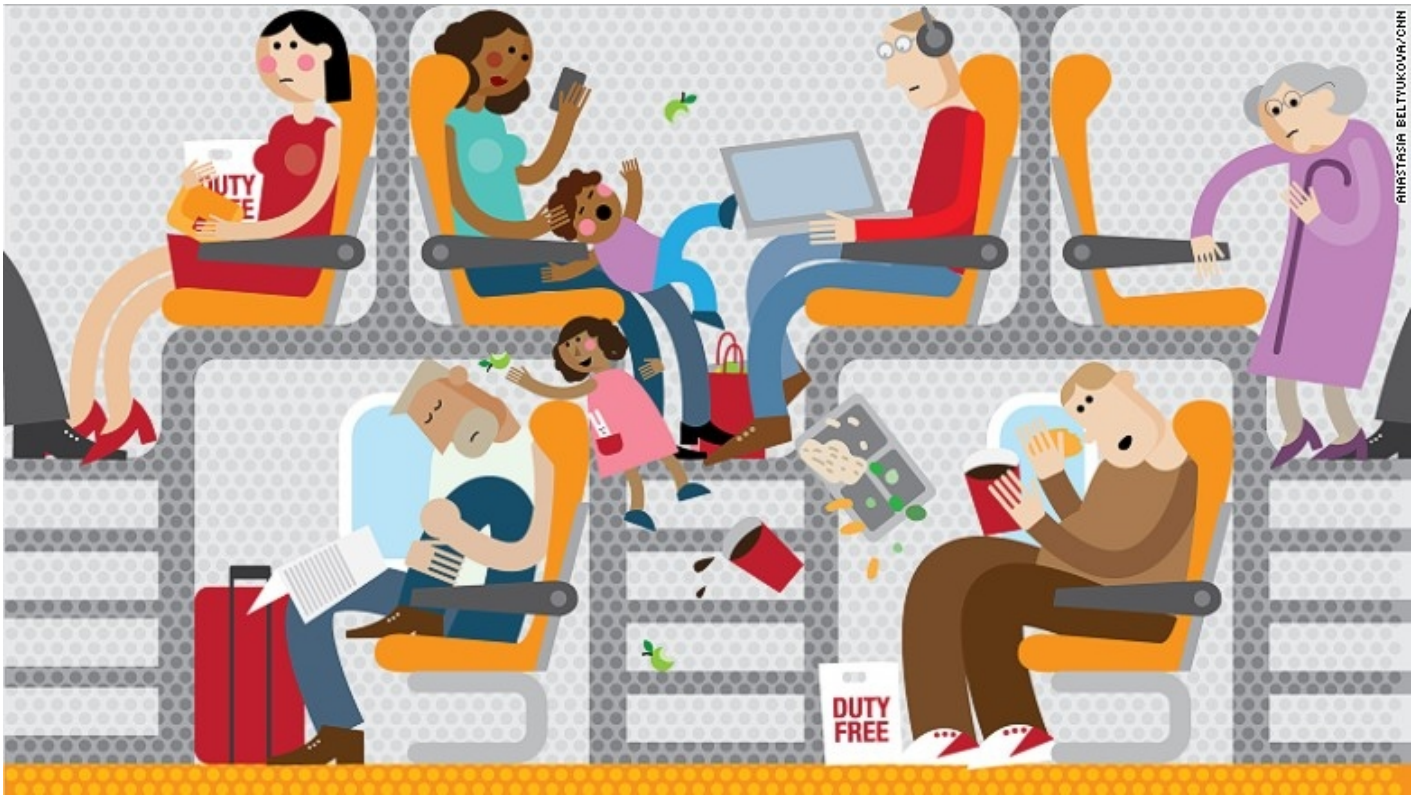

A congressional soldier fighting a war against shrinking airline seats lost a battle in the U.S. House Thursday.

In a 26-33 vote, a House committee defeated legislation that would have mandated size standards for airline passenger seats. "I am disappointed," Rep. Steve Cohen, D-Tennessee, said in a statement. "This was a vote against the safety and health of airline passengers."

Cohen says that seat width on U.S. airliners "has shrunk from 18 inches in the 1970s to about 16.5 inches today."

The issue, he says, is more about safety than comfort. He says the Federal Aviation Administration is putting passengers at risk because there hasn't been adequate emergency evacuation testing of airline seating with rows set with pitch under 29 inches. "Pitch" is the distance between any point on one seat to the same point on the seat in front.

The vote came as the House transportation committee was voting on amendments to a bill to fund the FAA.

Cohen wants the FAA to study seat safety regarding size and then, if necessary, issue minimum or

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specific seat sizes as a mandated federal industry standard.

Before the vote, other committee members said the existing bill already included provisions to evaluate airline evacuations. But Cohen said in general, airline seats are "hard to get out of" and "they keep getting smaller and smaller."

"We're down to four major carriers and they do what they want," Cohen said, referring to recent mergers of the nation's large airlines.

In response, Rep. Rodney Davis, R-Illinois, told Cohen, "I think we got to the root of the issue as a whole. It's your issue with the airline industry."

The powerful Washington airline lobbying group Airlines for America opposes the idea. In a statement on Wednesday, the group said, "... the government should not regulate, but instead market forces, which reflect consumer decisions, and competition should determine what is offered. ... And as with any commercial product or service, customers vote every day with their wallet."

Cohen said he isn't planning to give up his crusade. He's promising to try to add it to the bill again when it comes to the floor of the House.

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