

**GAMBLING ON LOWER AIRFARES -- CARLOS MAYANS, A - Wichita Eagle, The (KS) - January 14, 2001 - page 1A**

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TOPEKA - On Jan. 23, David Larson will leave Wichita at 2 a.m., drive to Kansas City International Airport and catch a 6:30 flight to Detroit.

As a small-business owner, he's familiar with the routine.

Three times a month or more, Larson or one of his employees at Westland Corp. makes the trip to Kansas City or Oklahoma City.

"We do that simply because it's a \$600 or \$700 savings," he said.

While city and chamber of commerce officials continue to negotiate with airlines for lower fares, a state representative from Wichita is trying a different approach.

**Carlos Mayans** is drafting legislation to earmark \$4 million a year in Kansas Lottery revenues to subsidize airfares from Wichita Mid-Continent Airport.

Mayans said his bill will not change the Legislature's intent. Most of the state's take from the lottery goes to economic development; he sees no bigger economic development issue in central Kansas than cheaper airfares out of Wichita.

"We are saying we want to make a commitment to the largest airport in Kansas," Mayans said.

It won't be an easy sell.

Renewal of the lottery is expected to be contentious this year. Lawmakers will be looking into allegations of theft and mismanagement at the agency.

Gov. Bill Graves and legislative leaders want a clean and simple renewal bill to keep the lottery, and the \$60 million a year it generates for the state, from coming to a halt in the middle of next year.

Plus, Mayans will need to convince lawmakers outside Wichita that low airfares are important to their constituents, too.

That will be a tough job in eastern and far western Kansas, where it's just as easy to drive to Kansas City or Denver as to Wichita.

But Mayans thinks he's got a shot.

"There's a window of opportunity now when I think we can get some consensus," he said.

Mayans, a Republican, wants to use the money to lure a low-fare carrier to Wichita with the

guarantee that a certain number of seats will be sold each month. He says airfares could go even higher in the long run with the pending buyout of bankrupt TWA by American Airlines.

Airport Director Bailis Bell supplied the \$4 million figure. "That's an educated guess on my part," he said.

The concept, if not the specific proposal, has support from Wichita city and business leaders.

Mayor Bob Knight said subsidies will probably be necessary to attract and keep a low-fare carrier. He and Wichita Area Chamber of Commerce officials are talking with airlines about the issue but declined to name the companies or the potential cost.

Sen. Les Donovan of Wichita, chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee, said the subsidy could probably be justified.

"We use economic development for virtually everything known to man," he said. "It's an extremely interesting approach. I wish I'd thought of it."

The chairwoman of the Senate committee that will handle the lottery renewal bill likes the idea of lower airfares but is skeptical that a subsidy for Mid-Continent will gain much support from lawmakers outside the area.

Sen. Nancey Harrington, R-Goddard, said she wants to pass a lottery bill that is not loaded up with other issues. Some lawmakers already have said they want to use the lottery bill as a vehicle to approve slot machines at racetracks such as Wichita Greyhound Park, where pari-mutuel betting is allowed.

"If it becomes slot-burdened, I won't support it," she said.

Larson just wants to see something done, and he's growing impatient with what he sees as a lack of action on airfares.

He came to Wichita from Chicago nine years ago to be vice president of Westland and ended up buying the company, which makes equipment used by companies that process plastic.

Larson said he intended to move the company out of Wichita to be closer to a major airport, trains and trucks. However, he grew attached to the friendly people, the climate and, most importantly, the work ethic of his 46 employees in Wichita.

Still, more than half of his customers are east of the Mississippi River, so frequent travel is necessary.

"Constantly, we have people driving to Oklahoma City or Kansas City to save money," he said. "It's extremely difficult to do business and compete."

Reach Steve Painterat (785) 296-3006 or [spainter@wichitaeagle.com](mailto:spainter@wichitaeagle.com).

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