

September 15, 2004

The Great Forest Park Balloon Race Narrowly Averts Homeland Security Cancellation

Washington, D.C. - Congressman Todd Akin's office has been informed that the 32nd Great St. Louis Balloon Race will be spared cancellation due to a waiver granted by the U.S. Department of Transportation. Last week, Akin (R-MO) personally contacted the office of Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta to grant a waiver to Public Law 108-199 that would have halted the 32nd Annual Great Forest Park Balloon Race later this September 18th.

This newly enforced law requires that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) prohibit the flying of aircraft within 3 miles and below 3,000 feet near any major stadium event. Since the St. Louis Cardinals are scheduled to play at Busch Stadium at the time the race is scheduled and since prevailing winds often blow the balloons in the direction of downtown, the race seemed impossible given the new public law. Although sympathetic to race organizers, regional FAA officials were unable to grant a waiver unless reviewed by a higher authority.

Akin was approached last week by race organizers, who asked his assistance in obtaining the waiver. It is estimated that over 130,000 spectators attend the event.

The St. Louis Cardinals and Major League Baseball provided a formal letter of invitation to balloonists to share the airspace surrounding Busch Stadium and Congressman Akin worked with Secretary Norman Mineta's office to obtain the waiver.

"The race is a very important civic event for the region and should not fall victim to an unintended consequence of an otherwise prudent anti-terrorist law," said Akin. "I am thankful to the Cardinals and Secretary Norman Mineta for working toward a reasonable solution that will allow this great St. Louis tradition to continue."