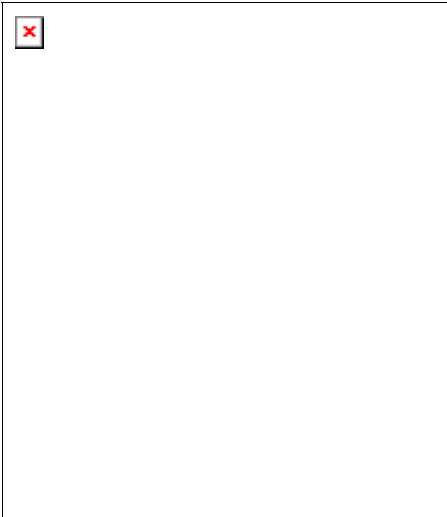


## United to start nonstop flights from Springs to Washington, D.C.

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United Express will begin a daily nonstop flight from Colorado Springs to Dulles International Airport near Washington on June 9, fulfilling a longtime goal of local officials, Mark Earle, aviation director of the Colorado Springs Airport, said Monday.

Airport officials began discussing the route most recently at an aviation industry conference last fall, Earle said.

But the route has been sought by local officials for more than a decade because of the city's close military and business ties to the Washington area.

Washington becomes the first new nonstop destination added at the Springs airport since Northwest Airlines added Memphis, Tenn., to its local flight schedule for a few months in 2008.

Nonstop flights to Washington have not been available since Western Pacific Airlines stopped service there in 1997.

"Washington has always been one of our primary targets for air service," Earle said. "We are extremely happy. Washington service is terrific. It is a prime target for us because it serves a big part of our economy and it shows that airlines are again planning for growth."

SkyWest will operate the route with a 64-seat regional jet aircraft, Earle said.

Flight 6591, operated by SkyWest Airlines for United Express, will leave Colorado Springs daily at 8:55 a.m. and arrive in Washington at 2:04 p.m.

Flight 6139, also operated by SkyWest, will leave Dulles daily at 6:55 p.m. and arrive in Colorado Springs at 8:32 p.m.

United currently lists a round-trip, economy-class fare of \$394 on its Web site for the flight, not including taxes and fees.

The new flights are good news, said Mike Boyd, an Evergreen-based aviation industry consultant.

But he noted that the 3½-hour trip on a regional jet might be tough for some passengers because those jets are smaller than full-size aircraft. He said the initial once-a-day flight could lead to additional daily flights between the two airports.

The new flight will help Experience Colorado Springs, the local convention and visitors bureau, attract more meeting and convention groups to the area, said Chelsy Murphy, the bureau's public relations manager.

"Our largest group business during 2009 was for military reunions and government meetings," Murphy said. "A daily direct flight will certainly help that business. Additional air service always helps the tourism industry, especially when it is nonstop service."

United added the flight six weeks after US Airways ended service to Colorado Springs after more than two decades, leaving the airport without nonstop service to Phoenix.

Since then, Colorado Springs has had nonstop service to 10 cities. Earle said airport officials are working with other carriers to resume service to Phoenix and also are seeking nonstop service to New York, San Antonio and San Diego as their top priorities.

"This is fantastic news. Washington is one of the major areas of air service we have been lacking in the community and was at the top of the list, especially considering the large concentration of defense contractors here," said Mike Kazmierski, CEO of the Colorado Springs Regional Economic Development Corp.

"Flights to Washington have been a recurring area of concern to companies that are considering expanding in Colorado Springs."

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