

# Senators seek to allow electronics on planes

By Bart Jansen, USA Today

Several senators rekindled the debate Tuesday whether personal gadgets interfere with an airliner's cockpit electronics and urged the head of the Federal Aviation Administration to allow more gadgets on planes.

Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo. told FAA Administrator Michael Huerta there is no risk from personal electronics that are restricted near takeoff and landing on airliners because passengers use gadgets on general-aviation planes all the time.

McCaskill also rejected the idea that electronics were a distraction from safety lectures at the start of flights because flight attendants don't insist that passengers put down their copies of "War and Peace."

"I feel very strongly that this is an example of a rule that needs to go away," McCaskill said of restrictions against personal electronics.

Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., said he would join her in changing the rules.

"It seems like these are rules for rules' sake that sometimes go beyond what is even practical, let alone what is safe," Thune said.

Personal electronics such as Kindles or iPads are prohibited from use when a plane is below 10,000 feet in the air. But the FAA has an advisory committee studying whether to allow electronics, which Huerta said "is of great personal interest to me."

The study doesn't cover cell phones because the Federal Communications Commission bans those phones on planes.

Huerta said plane manufacturers, flight crews and electronics makers are participating in the study, which is expected to make a recommendation in July. He said one complication is how crew members could distinguish between restricted phones and other electronics while a plane is taking off or landing.

"The worst of all worlds for them would be if we made some determination that certain devices were OK while others are not because it becomes an extremely difficult thing for them to enforce," Huerta said.

McCaskill said if the FAA doesn't expand the use of electronics by the end of the year, she wants a written explanation for why not. And she asked Huerta to explain why personal electronics are allowed on Air Force One, but not airliners.

"If it's safe enough for the president of the United States, it's safe enough for the flying public," McCaskill said.