

## **Delta, Northwest could get less pension help**

Thu Jul 20, 2006 7:41pm ET  
By John Crawley

WASHINGTON, July 20 (Reuters) - Delta Air Lines and Northwest Airlines could get less pension relief than they originally sought but appear satisfied with the prospect, Sen. Trent Lott said on Thursday.

The Mississippi Republican, a member of the House and Senate negotiating panel crafting a bill to overhaul U.S. funding rules for employer-provided pensions, said lawmakers have agreed to extend the time the carriers have to fully fund their pensions.

Lott said the two bankrupt airlines can "get by with a little less" than the 20 years of extra relief they had sought. "They are going to get a good solid number that will be OK with them," Lott said in an interview with Reuters.

At Delta, promised benefits outpace pension assets by \$6.3 billion. Underfunding at Northwest is roughly \$3.7 billion, records show.

A Delta official could not be reached for comment. Northwest would not comment on Lott's remarks. Both have said they want the full 20-year allowance. The bill is expected to offer all companies 7 years to restore their pension funding.

Delta has already announced it will try to terminate its pilots' plan to save money.

But the airline has said it could save its other plan for non-union workers, retirees and their dependents if it received a meaningful extension of the contribution timetable.

Northwest also has said it could save its three pension plans if it got similar help. Continued...

Lott said other airlines pushing for assistance, like American Airlines

and Continental Airlines, will likely be given choices on funding and should find the final agreement acceptable barring any last minute changes.

"All of them are OK with it," Lott said.

American had no comment while Continental said Congress should give equal treatment to all carriers.

Lott and other lawmakers say details are being finalized