Pause, if you will, and shed a tear (but not too many) for the poor airline industry. Commercial airlines enjoyed their best year in history in 1954 and it looks like 1955 will be even better. But yet the airline people are sad. They will get only $48.9 million in federal subsidies for fiscal 1955, instead of the $73 million they asked for. The subsidy lobbies in Washington are screaming bloody murder about this, and it is sweet music to my ears.

Do I hate the airlines? No. I wish them all the good luck in the world. But I am sick and tired of paying taxes to support a billion dollar industry. Frankly, I need the money more than the airlines do. I don't have a billion of anything, much less dollars.

If you are under the impression that all the money Uncle Sam gives the airlines goes for new planes and improved service, you're mistaken. Some of the money goes for that, of course. But the rest goes for paying dividends to stockholders, building and operating tourist hotels, expense accounts and—believe it or not—income tax. Yes, you and I pay income tax so that the government can give it to the airlines so they can pay their taxes, too!

Now, don't confuse subsidies with service mail pay. Subsidies are something for nothing, pure and simple gifts of the taxpayers' money. Service mail pay is what the government gives the airlines to haul air mail. That's entirely separate. The subsidies I'm talking about cost New York taxpayers about $6.1 million in this fiscal year. That's what we paid to allow some airlines to build hotels, run contests, throw parties in Washington, etc.

"American Aviation Daily," the mouthpiece of the airline industry, says Congress' decision to cut the subsidies means "economies" will have to be instituted "in the Alaska area." If that isn't heartbreaking, I don't know what is.

Imagine.
Economies.
In Alaska.
What's this world coming to?

The man who did more than anyone else to cut $21.1 million from the $73 million in subsidies the airlines were hoping to get is Congressman John J. Rooney of Brooklyn. After Congress cut $33 million from the Civil Aeronautics Board's original request, the Board tried to get $31 million restored in a supplemental appropriation. The Senate was ready to restore $15 million, but Rooney insisted $5 million was more than enough. Result: A compromise of $8.9 million.

The airline lobby, however, is not about to take this lying down. The House Appropriations Committee has already been asked to approve a $63 million subsidy for the coming fiscal year. That's in addition to $77 million in service mail pay. If Congress okays the $63 million subsidy request, it will cost Empire State taxpayers over $7.8 million in fiscal 1956. That's a lot of money for sky hooks and prop wash.