



# DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

# NEWS

## OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION WILLIAM T. COLEMAN, JR., TO THE 20th ANNUAL MEETING AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL ASSOCIATION, WASHINGTON, D.C., OCTOBER 29, 1975

I am flattered to have a part in this 20th Annual Meeting of the Air Traffic Control Association.

I want to extend my compliments to the individual and corporate members of ATCA who, through these past 20 years have paced the growth of aviation by continually upgrading the safety of flight.

Last year some 210 million passengers traveled by U.S. scheduled airlines; another 90 million by general aviation aircraft; still others in military planes. Through more than 23 million IFR center operations, nearly 59 million tower operations, 58 million flight service station services, and 14 million military aircraft operations, you assured that those travelers by air reached their destinations safely -- and without any cause to be mad at the pilot.

As a frequent passenger myself -- and as the public official the President and Congress call on first when something isn't right in transportation -- I would like to thank you, the civilian and military air traffic controllers of America, for these many years of selfless, largely unsung, but consistently professional service. The superb and eminently safe system of air transportation we take for granted would not exist without your constant care and concern for the air traveler and your intense dedication to duty. I want you to know that your work is genuinely appreciated. I am proud that the air traffic control service is a part of the Department of Transportation. After all, the U.S. aviation system is the world's safest and most modern. It is also the standard of the world. We have freely exported our safety ideas and practices to the rest of the world -- ideas and techniques that your skills, courage and dedication have produced.

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I am disturbed, however, by attempts made now and again to separate the Federal Aviation Administration from the Department. I was not present for the wedding eight years ago, but I would say that, for two growing and dynamic organizations, it seems to me to have been a good marriage -- and I see no justification for a divorce. I think recent suggestions advocating independence for the FAA are ill-advised, and there are no valid grounds for allegations that air safety would be better served by such action.

Last April, at the time the report by the special task force on aviation safety was submitted, I tried to make two things very clear. One, there can be no compromise with safety, on any terms or for any reason. And, two, I stressed that there would be no interference from my office with the FAA's conduct of the air safety mission. In fact, I made it unmistakably clear that the administrator of the FAA was to be my principal adviser on matters which are within the FAA charter.

On that basis, I concurred in the findings of the task force and passed the 19 recommendations on to the FAA for implementation, and they are being accomplished.

Now, if the Department's function is not to look over the FAA's shoulder in the administration of aviation safety, what then is the purpose of the DOT-FAA organizational relationship?

I suggest, first, that as a major - and growing - mode of public transportation, aviation needs a political officer at the Cabinet level of government and before Congress. After all, the FAA has 55,000 people and an annual budget in excess of \$2 billion. No part of the Executive Branch can function well if its spokesman is not a Cabinet officer and does not have direct access to the President and to the director of budget and management.

I suggest, secondly, that our goal of an efficient, integrated national transportation system is well-served by a central planning, budgeting and policy-making organization.

Expansion of the Cabinet clearly is not in order. And by logic it would not make sense for the FAA to be placed in the Department of Defense, or the Department of Commerce. Nor would the interests of FAA people be served by excising the agency from the Department of Transportation.

I have enjoyed what I consider to be an excellent working relationship with Jimmie Dow, and I do not believe I have tried at any time to tell him how to run the agency on a day-to-day basis. I have too much respect for his experience and managerial ability to do that. But in terms of broad policy guidelines, not related to safety, and cohesive transportation planning, FAA is logically a part of the DOT and should remain so.

Now, secondly, and perhaps to demonstrate that the Secretary of Transportation does represent aviation's best interests, I'd like to comment just briefly on the airport aid and regulatory reform proposals we have in Congress.

Since the Airport and Airway Development Act of 1970, funding for the Nation's airports and airways has increased significantly. Under the old federal-aid airport program, annual authorizations never exceeded \$75 million. By contrast, more than a billion dollars -- \$1.3 billion, to be exact -- has been obligated for airport development and improvements in the five years since 1970.

The original ADAP legislation, as you know, expired last June 30. The intent of our proposal for a new ADAP bill has been to retain the good features of the 1970 act while improving the overall execution of the program.

Such a bill is in the making. The House Public Works and Transportation Committee recently reported an ADAP bill, which modifies somewhat the Administration's proposal, but which is -- on the other hand -- a reasonable compromise.

It increases the funding level for air carrier and general aviation development, and it authorizes the use of trust fund monies to help pay a small part of the annual maintenance costs of airway facilities built by proceeds from the fund.

Senate mark-up should follow shortly and I am hopeful that a final bill will be voted on in a matter of weeks.

As members of the aviation community, you are concerned, too, I am sure, for the future of our Nation's air carrier system. Since we submitted our proposed Aviation Act of 1975 to the Congress earlier this month, I have been hearing anguished cries from the industry that airline franchises would be destroyed and communities would be left without air transportation.

To those anxieties, I would like to say just three things: One - the airline industry is no longer the infant it was when airline route and rate structures were established nearly 40 years ago. The industry operates today under artificially contrived restrictions on services that are wasteful of energy, and under prescribed fare schedules that prevent meaningful price competition. The chairman of a major U.S. air carrier acknowledged recently that the airline flew 80 percent of its routes at a loss. And, noting that "90 percent of the domestic air traffic is highly competitive," he asked the question I, in effect, am asking: "Why should there be price controls?"

The second thing I want to say is that I consider the airline industry to be essential to our Nation. It must be preserved. But when I ask airline executives what changes they feel should be made to improve airline economics or service, I get answers that I can't support. Most, I find, would like subsidies or some assurances of protection against even fair competition.

I happen to believe that the public is entitled to the best, as well as the safest, air transportation possible, at the lowest possible cost, I also think that well-managed air carriers should be permitted to earn a fair and reasonable return on investment. And I do not feel that those two precepts are incompatible or inconsistent. Under present regulatory constraints, however, they are difficult to achieve.

Then, thirdly, I want to be understood that in recommending changes in regulatory policy, I am not suggesting that changes occur overnight. Provisions in our legislation call for the gradual introduction of price and route competition, and a time-phased transition to free market conditions. Just as the shift to automated air traffic control procedures occurred over a long period, the phasing out of anti-competitive aspects of airline regulations would be cushioned by time.

We would not, and could not, direct the movement of today's civil and military jet fleets using air traffic control methods and equipment of the 1930's. Neither should the airlines be required to operate today under the economic rules of a bygone era.

Finally, I want to conclude these comments where I began -- with a few words of personal praise and admiration for the air traffic control profession.

Last Friday at our annual awards ceremony, it was my privilege to present the DOT gold medal -- the Department's highest award for valor -- to four air traffic controllers: Joseph Fordham, Donald Kidder, Charles MacDonald and Everett Sinon.

Each of these awards was for an act of heroism. But what is especially significant to me is that none of these acts of great courage came in the line of official duty. These men, at considerable personal risk, rescued men, women and children from the perils of water, fire and ice.

Neither are these isolated cases. The air traffic controller, in his job and away from it, is a "life-saving specialist." The files are replete with reports of pilots and passengers alive today because of the quick and competent response to air emergencies by air traffic control personnel.

To me this is extremely gratifying. It proclaims not only the controller's full measure of dedication to safety, but a commitment to that extra measure of skill and mental dexterity sometimes needed to save a life. This devotion has become an accepted characteristic of the air traffic controller "job description," but I hope we never take it for granted.

Last year FAA air traffic controllers rendered 3,000 flight assists, directly affecting the lives of 4,639 people. Our Nation's military flight controllers -- in the Air Force, Navy and Army -- provided similar assistance to military and civil aircraft alike.

I know that on occasion a controller's judgment will be debated or his performance questioned. The rarity of such instances is, in itself, a tribute to the competence of the air traffic control professional, the conscientious way he carries out his responsibilities, and the great confidence -- born of training and discipline -- that he brings to his - or her - job.

On that note, may I say -- in closing -- that I have never considered the qualities of intelligence and perception and judgment to be the exclusive properties of one sex or one race. The services, in my opinion, have the edge on us in employing more women, and minorities, in the air traffic control career field.

We are, I detect, doing better in this respect. Of the 23,000 air traffic controllers employed by the FAA in June of 1973, 1,300 -- or about 6 percent -- were minorities. Of the 26,680 control personnel on board as of September 30 this year, nearly 2,000 -- or 7.3 percent -- were minorities. Since I have set a minimum goal of 15 percent minority employment within the Department by next July, and have clearly stated my desire to see more women in responsible positions, I would hope that more opportunities will be accorded, both to minorities and to women, in the air traffic control profession in the months ahead.

Again, let me thank you for your outstanding service to the Department, to aviation, and to the Nation. As I told my audience at the awards program last Friday, my goal is to conduct the affairs of the Department in such a manner that our accomplishments will be rewarding for the country, and a matter of personal pride to every DOT individual.

In addition, I would like to do it with such style and human consideration that every person in the Department will find it a joyful and pleasant place to work.

My congratulations to ATCA on 20 years of exemplary service dedicated to safety and career professionalism, and my best wishes for clear skies in the years ahead.