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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20590

STATEMENT OF JOHN A. VOLPE, SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION, BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON POST OFFICE AND CIVIL SERVICE REGARDING H.R. 8083 ON TUESDAY, JUNE 8, 1971.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to have this opportunity to appear before the Committee today in support of H.R. 8083. With me this morning are Mr. John H. Shaffer, Administrator of our Federal Aviation Administration, and Mr. Bert Harding, Associate Administrator for Manpower of the FAA. Mr. Shaffer will discuss with you our efforts to improve the air traffic controller career program and will set forth the major provisions of H.R. 8083. Before he does so, I wish to offer a few comments to emphasize the Department's need for this measure and to indicate its importance to the effective management of the air traffic controller system.

In the past two decades, tremendous technological gains have been made in our air traffic controller system. There has been an almost continual process of improvement, expansion, and development. The 1950's saw the advent of radar and improved navigational equipment. The 1960's brought the first widespread implementation of automation techniques. Last year we opened a new central flow control facility which gives us for the first time a total nation-wide air traffic picture. We are constantly updating our automation program, and this progress continues today.

In considering milestones of our development in this area, we must place at the top of the list passage of the Airport and Airway Development

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Act of 1970. This Act is enabling us to provide the badly needed hardware items, such as control towers, instrument landing systems, radars and the latest in modern automated equipment.

Despite these technological gains of the past and those which the future is sure to bring, our air traffic controller system does, and will continue to have as its single most important element its work force. We have a people system, Mr. Chairman. Nearly 20,000 controllers staff our towers and centers, and they will be the direct beneficiaries of the legislation which you have before you.

The work done by a person who chooses a career as an air traffic controller is truly unique. The work presents an exciting challenge and involvement in one of the most dynamic and forward-looking industries of today. With that challenge comes the most serious responsibility of safeguarding airmen and air travelers whose well-being depends to a significant degree upon the satisfactory performance of one's job--a performance which has little tolerance for error.

As the growth of aviation continues to place increasing demands on our air traffic controller system, the demands on our controllers have correspondingly increased and become more complex. Our experience shows that advancing years do not improve a controller's performance of his most difficult tasks, yet the skills which he learns during his years of dedicated service have limited applicability to other jobs. There is little opportunity to find similar work at comparable salaries for one who can no longer meet the rigors of the job.

We must now effectively deal with the problems facing an air traffic controller career employee, or face the distinct possibility of diminishing

safety and efficiency in our air traffic controller system. We feel that H.R. 8083 is a key part of the solution. We feel we have presented to the Congress an excellent, workable proposal, and we strongly recommend its enactment into law. We hope this measure will not be delayed so that we can get on with the job of meeting the needs of the air traffic control system and our air traffic controllers

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This concludes my prepared statement. At this time, Mr. Shaffer will present his statement, and he and his staff will be happy to respond to any questions you may have.