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Transportation

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STATEMENT BY  
SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION ELIZABETH HANFORD DOLE  
PRESS CONFERENCE  
SEPTEMBER 19, 1985  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

I have just returned from briefing the President and the Cabinet on the issue of air safety. This meeting provided me an opportunity to discuss the Department's agenda and accomplishments in the field of air safety and security, and I am pleased to meet with you, as well, to provide a status report.

The air traffic control work force has been rebuilt to the level projected immediately following the 1981 PATCO strike. In this process of rebuilding the controller work force, safety has not been compromised. Indeed, over the greater part of this period accident rates have been down, and the differing causes of the recent crashes do not point to a problem with the air traffic control system.

As I told the President today, the Department's essential task now is to ensure that the controller work force is maintained at a level that will be fully responsive to present challenges: an industry flourishing in the freedom afforded by deregulation; increasing use by airlines of "hub-and-spoke" operating patterns; and passenger demand that is expanding on the strength of economic recovery. In fiscal year 1986 we expect to add approximately 480 more people to the existing controller work force, and fiscal year 1987 will see a further increase.

A crucial part of our aviation program relies on the National Airspace System (NAS) Plan, an \$11.7 billion, long-range capital program to modernize and expand the Nation's air traffic control system. The NAS Plan envisions increased safety, capacity, productivity and economy as a result of higher levels of automation, facility consolidations and use of new telecommunications technology. This plan will ultimately double the capacity of the system and is funded entirely from the Airport and Airway Trust Fund. Savings from the Plan are estimated to be \$18 billion to the government and approximately \$10 billion for system users during 1981 to the year 2000.

As we review issues of capacity, one problem area we have sought to resolve is airport delays. These delays, which were a major problem in the summer of 1984, have been reduced by 30 percent this year and the actual delays are far less. This is despite the fact that traffic has increased over last summer's levels. Actions by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to make its procedures more efficient, cooperation by the airlines in smoothing schedules at the airports where delays were a problem, and the

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increasing training and experience levels of the controllers have been important steps in the delay reductions.

Last year, I called for an unprecedented, comprehensive "white glove" inspection of all the nation's airlines. The first phase covered 325 air carriers, involved more than 14,000 separate inspections and was followed by a more in-depth look at some 40 air carriers. During this 90-day inspection, we uncovered a number of safety violations among airlines. All such violations were remedied and enforcement actions were taken. Overall, however, we found a high level of compliance and a safe system. And we continue monitoring the system through unannounced checks as well.

As a follow-up to the air carrier safety program, I initiated a comprehensive plan to examine and enhance the safety of the aviation industry. Since this facet of aviation is far more diverse than the airline industry, the General Aviation Safety Audit was designed as a five-phase, 18-month review of the 210,000 aircraft in the general aviation fleet, flight schools, repair station mechanics, and on-demand air taxis. The second phase of our General Aviation Safety Audit which has just been completed found a better than 90 percent rate of compliance with safety standards.

Last month, a report prepared by my Safety Review Task Force on the FAA's flight standards safety programs was made public. Created in December 1983 to examine the Department's safety programs across all modes, the Task Force identified four areas where problems were found and improvements should be made. Don Engen regards the recommendations as "on the mark" and has already developed a schedule to implement the necessary reforms.

In addition, I have initiated "Project SAFE" (Safety Activity Functional Evaluation). The project is a comprehensive review of the agency's own safety inspection system including inspector tasks and work functions, and the overall management of the field inspector work force. I understand the final report will be sent to me shortly, however all indications are that the report supports the need for additional inspectors.

Last year, I increased the air carrier inspector work force by 25 percent. As a result of these safety audits and reviews, the increased number of air carriers and passengers in the system, I expect to add an additional 500 air carrier and general aviation inspectors to the Department's work force over the next three years.

In keeping with our commitment to aviation safety, the Department has completed action on a number of important safety regulations this fiscal year. These include: restrictions on drug and alcohol use by flight crew members; flammability requirements for airplane seat cushions; improved cabin escape path marking and lighting; installation of smoke detectors in aircraft lavatories and galleys; installation of automatic fire extinguishers in lavatories, and hand held fire extinguishers in aircraft cabins. The Department also recently proposed legislation to Congress that would increase civil penalties for safety violations from \$1,000 to \$10,000.

And last week we proposed a regulation requiring that all new transponders installed in aircraft after January 1, 1992, be compatible with the new-technology radar



beacon system that will be installed in the future. The new system will give controllers more accurate aircraft position and identification information.

Several additional regulations are in various stages of the rulemaking process. Among the most important are cabin flammability standards, improved medical kits, shoulder harnesses for smaller aircraft, and passenger seat strength requirements. Our system of aviation safety regulations continues to serve as a model for nations throughout the world and the resulting safety record is one in which we can take great pride.

In the area of aviation security, the hijacking of TWA Flight 847 in Athens last June, followed by the probable sabotage of two aircraft operating out of Canada, has called into question the vulnerability of international civil aviation to terrorist acts.

In direct response to the President's requests of June 18 on this issue, the Department of Transportation, in conjunction with the Departments of State, Treasury and Justice undertook a number of actions to enhance aviation security which are currently ongoing.

We have increased aviation security by requiring additional checks of carry-on baggage, elimination of curbside check-in for international flights, holding of cargo moving on passenger flights, special security for aircraft, closer surveillance of all persons who have access to aircraft -- such as fueling and catering -- and a positive match of passengers and checked baggage.

I immediately expanded our federal Air Marshal program. We issued regulations requiring the designation of ground and inflight security coordinators for all foreign and domestic flights. Training requirements for all members of flight crews have also been stiffened. FAA teams have now completed security assessment visits to 50 foreign airports. In general, they found security to be quite good; in certain instances they have worked cooperatively with foreign agencies to correct problems found. Based on recommendations by the U.S. Government and other governments, the International Civil Aviation Organization is expected to recommend tighter security standards for the 156 member nations at its session this week in Montreal.

I am completely and totally committed to aviation safety. The fact is that flying continues to be one of the safest forms of transportation. Each day in the U.S., some 14,000 scheduled airline flights carry an average of one million passengers, and 99.999 percent of these flights reach their destinations without incident. Even taking the recent tragic airline accidents into account, the accident rate for airline travel has declined steadily over the past decade. This decline has occurred despite the fact that air travel has grown by some 20 percent.

One accident is one too many. And I assure you that we will continually strive to make the safest system in the world ever safer.

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