



U.S. Department of
Transportation

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STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ELIZABETH DOLE
SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION
BEFORE THE
SENATE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
JULY 8, 1987

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I am happy to appear before this Subcommittee today to address our Fiscal Year 1988 budget amendment for the Federal Aviation Administration. As you know, for Fiscal Year 1988, I asked, for a 20 percent increase in FAA funding about \$1 billion -- almost unprecedented, for though federal spending must be reduced to bring down the deficit, we do not propose to economize on safety.

With regard to the budget amendment, I have repeatedly told the FAA Administrator that he will get as many additional controllers as he believes he needs. While we had planned to reach a controller workforce of 15,225 by September 30, 1988, we now anticipate reaching that level at the end of this fiscal year, as requested by your report on the Fiscal Year 1987 supplemental.

The Administration's original request for a 15,225 controller workforce by the end of Fiscal Year 1988 was based on the best information and projections available when the budget was submitted. But U.S. aviation is in a period of rapid change, and management principles, as well as practical necessity, dictate that the FAA continuously review and update its projections. Thus I fully support Don Engen's request for 580 additional controllers and 375 additional support personnel.

In the past, we have slightly overestimated future air traffic activity and growth, but that has certainly not been the case with FAA's projections for Fiscal Year 1988. During March, FAA began a three-month reassessment of its aviation forecasts and related controller requirements. As a result, FAA now believes that, instead of the originally projected 3-4 percent annual traffic growth, it would be prudent to assume that we will see traffic growth at a 5-6 percent annual rate through next year.

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This increase in air traffic growth projections, plus other steps we are taking to enhance aviation safety, such as creation of additional airport radar service areas and an addition of 20 new air sectors nationwide, means we will need to begin training additional controllers and crucial support personnel in the next few months. Because waiting for the next budget cycle would have introduced an unacceptable one year delay, we proposed a Fiscal Year 1988 budget amendment on June 3rd, which adds the 955 people to FAA's previous request.

The FAA Administrator has testified repeatedly that an increase in supervisors and technical staff is equally as important as controller workforce increases; so this amendment does provide the 375 additional on-site support staff to manage the system. Included are supervisors, traffic management coordinators and other technical support personnel. Traffic management coordinators work in the centers and towers and, by monitoring the operation of the system, help improve the flow of traffic, which, of course enhances safety and reduces delays.

Another important feature of our amendment is the expansion to at least two additional centers, the radar training program for controllers which has been successful for the Chicago center. This program utilizes the computer capability of the FAA academy to simulate the actual sectors at designated centers. Thus it accelerates the process of qualifying developmental controllers with site-specific training.

Let me emphasize one point: the proper way to set controller staffing goals is by analysis of the actual traffic demands the system is facing and is projected to face in the future, and by application of technical staffing standards for all of the necessary personnel -- controllers, supervisors, and technical support personnel. Statutory targets can inadvertently distort traffic management in ways that eventually impede the FAA's ability to handle traffic as safely and efficiently as possible.

One example is statutorily establishing a minimum number of controllers to achieve "full performance level" (FPL). Most of the 375 non-controller positions in the amendment and the 50 supervisory positions in our original 1988 budget request will be filled by promoting FPL controllers. These people will not be lost to the system; in fact, they will be performing integral air traffic functions. But they will no longer be counted as FPL's, and these promotions will temporarily reduce the number of FPL's in the workforce.

Since FAA can neither promote nor certify additional operational controllers to FPL status until they meet the requisite qualifications, a statutory FPL floor could put pressure on managers to delay promotions of FPL controllers to supervisory positions or to restrict movement of FPL's between facilities in order to maintain a high FPL count. It comes down to

a choice between meeting a statutory mandate and best managing the air traffic control system.

I hope that you will join the House Committee in favorably considering the personnel increases we have requested, while resisting efforts to limit the FAA's managerial flexibility in ways that would be detrimental.

This completes my statement, and I would be pleased to respond to any questions from the Subcommittee.

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