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SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION ELIZABETH HANFORD DOLE
WASHINGTON-DULLES TASK FORCE DINNER
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Ladies and gentlemen, you've worked a miracle with the transfer of National and Dulles Airports to the regional authority. When I think of how many people told us "it can't be done," I almost feel like I'm dreaming. If I conducted an informal poll, I'll bet most of you feel the same way. I wonder how many of you thought we'd actually do it when we first started out?... Here's a tougher one: How many different times along the way did you think we'd lost it for sure?

As we all know, only too well, there had been eight different attempts to transfer the airports since 1949. Not a single bill even made it out of Committee. Our bill looked destined for the same fate on many an occasion. We had to have not one but two Senate mark ups and we weren't at all sure we'd even get the second one scheduled. Then we got a nine day filibuster. We finally won the cloture vote, only to find that the bill would be sent to a House Committee that preferred a government corporation. Once there, technical problems delayed the Subcommittee mark up, and the full Committee never got to it. Senators Warner and Tribble managed with great finesse to get the House Subcommittee version on the Senate Continuing Resolution, anyway. It was then sent back to the House for a full vote. We had about two days to get to work and round up the voters. Getting the White House operator to track down all the numbers was a very educational experience -- I found congressmen in the most interesting places: Tom Tauke at the hospital where his wife had just had a baby. Some at cocktail parties, where I could hardly hear for the clinking of ice in the glass. I called Governor Baliles for Chuck Robb's home number, and found them both in with the Japanese, trying to sell Virginia products.

After I don't know how many phone calls, the House debate that threatened to turn our fair-haired project into a pumpkin finally started at

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midnight precisely. It passed at 1:30 a.m. -- just a few hours before the 99th Congress adjourned for good.

I can't credit a fairy godmother for our final success that evening -- because we owe that success entirely to the dedication and genius of you who are here this evening. Tonight you are honoring members of the new authority and myself. But truly it is we who should be honoring you. There are so many here tonight who have worked so very hard under the most difficult circumstances to complete the transfer.

I want to take the opportunity to specially thank some members of our team, both inside and outside the Department.

First, thanks to Governor Holton and his wonderful commission. He was instrumental in designing the transfer plan and he worked tirelessly to build a political consensus that would support it and he was a brilliant chairman for a commission that's now a model for other endeavors.

Second, my thanks to Greg Wolfe, who started with this project as Executive Director of the Holton Commission. His extensive institutional knowledge helped both the Commission -- and the bureaucracy -- work toward a positive vision of change.

Next, my thanks to Shirley Ybarra -- our resident expert. She contributed her broad-based knowledge of how airports really work from her years in aviation in the private sector. Even more, she gave tirelessly of herself to transform what some called a pipe dream into a major victory for us all.

And Rebecca Range, our brilliant legislative strategist -- or legislative magician, I sometimes think -- deserves special recognition. Just when we thought it was lost for sure, she'd have an idea that pulled us to safety -- right out of the fire back into the frying pan. And believe me, we pulled out all the stops on another issue -- and won yesterday to lose it today on a parliamentary maneuver.

I'd also like to single out Jim Wilding, the once and future director of the airports. He began his career as a junior engineer planning Dulles Airport back in the 1950's. Better than anyone else, he understood the great potential the transfer held for the future improvement of these facilities. With his expertise and his diplomacy, he reassured many an anxious legislator.

We all became experts at explaining Jim Wilding's drawings of the planned reconstruction of National and the expansion of Dulles -- especially the location of the new congressional parking lot.

And my most heartfelt thanks to the Dulles Task Force and the Coalition for National Airport. We couldn't have done it without your nonstop efforts -- and those of your companies -- blanketing the Hill to show your support

and make our case. I especially loved the brochures resembling airline tickets you passed out all over the Hill -- each inscribed with the bill number and the slogan "Your ticket for better air service." One thing I've certainly learned in Washington is that no initiative can succeed without the dedication of concerned and informed private citizens like yourselves.

But every army needs its generals, and we had some of the most courageous.

Senators Warner and Tribble would not give up. They tried to hook the Airport Bill on to everything that was moving in the Senate -- including Reconciliation and the Drug Bill. They managed the bill on the Senate floor through the exhausting nine-day filibuster. Gentlemen, may I offer my deepest admiration and gratitude for all you did.

Representatives Frank Wolf and Norm Sisisky also went far beyond the call of duty. Frank had one creative idea after another -- including his marvelous "Airport Day" on the Capitol steps. And the weekly strategy sessions he held in his office kept the troops in top form and high spirits no matter what.

Norm Sisisky took up the mantle for a Virginia cause and made the rounds -- and later told me this cost him more cigars than any bill he'd worked on.

My gratitude also to Representatives Norm Mineta, John Paul Hammerschmidt, Chairman Bill Lehman, and Sil Conte, for their hard work lining up the votes and explaining the plans to other members.

Their efforts were bolstered by the outstanding work of Governors Robb and Baliles, Secretary Vivian Watts, all the local governments, Mayor Barry and the District Council. Their calls and visits on the Hill made an enormous contribution. Thanks also to the Northern Virginia Assembly delegates -- you managed to get the required state legislation passed before we even had the federal bill drafted!

I could go on and on, but you all know who you are. All I can say is, thank you from the bottom of my heart.

We've come far together, but we still have a ways to go. I'm reminded of a famous story about Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, who once found himself on a train, but couldn't locate his ticket.

While the conductor watched, smiling, the 88 year old Justice Holmes searched through all his pockets without success. Of course, the conductor recognized the distinguished Justice, so he said, "Mr. Holmes, don't worry. You don't need your ticket. You will probably find it when you get off the train and I'm sure the Pennsylvania Railroad will trust you to mail it back later."

The Justice looked up at the conductor with some irritation and said, "My dear man, that is not the problem at all. The problem is not, where is my ticket. The problem is, where am I going?"

Knowing exactly where we're going will be the key to the future of Washington National and Dulles airports. Responsibility for the airport's future now lies with the Board -- and properly so. Their challenge will be nothing less than the transformation of the current shabby and overcrowded facilities into the first class airports the Nation's Capital deserves.

And to help the Board meet that challenge, the President has announced his intention to nominate Jack Edwards as the federal representative and your newest member of the Board. Jack is an Alabama lawyer and former ten-term Congressman from Mobile. He brings his long experience in the House and tremendous expertise as a member of the Transportation Appropriations Committee. He also has an intimate knowledge of the airports -- he has commuted regularly between Washington and Alabama for over 20 years.

On June 7, when we turn over the keys and the new airport authority takes charge of the operation, it will have the chance to put into action the plans Jim Wilding has been carrying around in his head and on his charts for so many years. I have been promising that transfer will mean major changes, and the regional authority now has the opportunity to make me an honest woman.

At Dulles, where the crowds have outgrown the beautiful Saarinen building, two new terminals will be built out on the airfield and acres of new parking.

And boy, this new parking will be especially appreciated. Right now it's so crowded that half the cars are illegally parked. No one pays any attention to the signs -- no matter what dire consequences they threaten.

At National, the improvements will be just as appreciated. The temporary structures that make up most of the airport -- the area from the traffic circle north to the commuter terminal -- will be torn down and replaced with a modern, two level terminal backing up on the Metro station.

The authority has demonstrated that it understands who really makes the airport work. It has already offered a raise to every one of the outstanding employees who will transfer with the airports.

And these are only for starters. I know that the Board has a number of ideas of their own to improve even further the operation, expansion and construction plans. We all look forward to their realization.

In addition to enormously enhancing the comfort and convenience of air travelers, the modernized and expanded airports will contribute substantially to the Washington area's economy. Since the 1978 Airline Deregulation Act, we've seen local airports become important engines of

regional economic growth. They help local businesses to compete and attract new business to the area, they generate revenues, and they increase property values. Thanks to you, Washington's two "engines" will no longer be running on empty. For in creating the regional authority, Virginia and the District have shown that they understand very well the great contributions these airports make to the quality of life in our community.

Many of you in this room attended the news conference we held on the Capitol steps on June 17, 1986. You'll all remember our message to the Congress on that day: "Free the Airports." Your hard work, your perseverance, and your ingenuity transformed a political prayer into a political prophecy. For as of June 7, 1987 -- nearly one year to the day later -- the airports at long last will be free. Thank you again from the bottom of my heart.

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