



U.S. Department of  
Transportation

# News:

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This is indeed a great day for Washington National and Dulles Airports and for the entire Washington area. It was three years ago today, I established the Holton Commission and said, "Don't tell me whether to do it -- tell me how -- give me a plan for the transfer of the airports. And almost exactly one year ago, many of you joined me on the Capitol steps to say to the Congress: "Free the Airports," "Free the Airports." Today, after years of hard work by each of you, that slogan is reality. These two-federally run airports are at long last, free to shape an exciting future as gateways to the nation's capital.

I remember that day on the Capitol steps, as I'm sure many of you do. We started as a small, but determined, group energized with the idea that National and Dulles should be run like all the rest of the nation's airports. Linwood Holton and the members of the Commission had worked hard to devise a plan we could sell for creating a regional authority. We knew we faced long odds -- after all, there had been eight different failed attempts to transfer the airports since 1949, none of them getting the support of either house of Congress. But we carried on. The Coalition for National Airport and the Dulles Task Force blanketed the Hill to show support for the transfer, giving a textbook demonstration of the effectiveness of citizen lobbying. From start to finish, we had a great deal of support from officials of the District, Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun and Alexandria. And even though our bill looked destined for defeat on many an occasion, we were tenacious. We hung on -- we didn't give up. And the bill passed just under the wire, before the 99th Congress adjourned for good.

All of you have played a major role in bringing us to this day. We needed each and every one of you to make this dream a reality. And while I sincerely wish I could recognize each of you individually, I want to express my special thanks to Governors Robb and Baliles, Secretary Vivian Watts and Mayor Barry and the District Council for their leadership at the state and local level, for their calls and visits to the Hill in support of the bill -- in fact, thanks to the quick work of the Northern Virginia Assembly delegates, the required state legislation passed before we even had the federal bill drafted! Senators Warner and Tribble and Congressman Wolf, Sisisky and Parris showed incredible skill in getting the bill through Congress; and Representatives Mineta, Hammerschmidt, Chairman Lehman, Sil Conte, Larry Coughlin and Ron Packard did yeoman's work in a magnificent effort that lined up the votes to win. And the leadership, the members and staffs of the House Public Works and Appropriations Committees and the Senate Commerce Committee did a tremendous job with the legislation. The bill was introduced, hearings were held in both Houses, and it passed in a single Congress. That's quite an accomplishment!

And the Authority Board was appointed within two months of the bill's passage -- and they've done the transition work with skill and sensitivity to the dedicated employees, faithful public servants. How great that 93 percent of the employees decided to remain in their jobs under the new authority -- they'll have the opportunity to shape the future of the airports. The lease was signed only two months after the Authority Board was appointed. And Linwood Holton and I have signed the certification giving the Board authority over the airports. The transition to regional control was made quickly and smoothly through the work of the Authority Board, Jim Wilding and his staff at the airports, employees at FAA Headquarters, the Mike Monroney Aeronautical Center, and my own staff throughout the Office of the Secretary. An estimated 100 DOT personnel alone was involved in the transition. Special thanks to Rebecca Range, our brilliant legislative strategist, Greg Wolfe, who started as Executive Director of the Holton Commission, and Shirley Ybarra, our resident expert and leader of the transition, all of whom gave tirelessly of themselves to transform what some called a pipe dream into a major victory for us all. We had a great deal of help from other agencies, including the Department of Justice, Social Security Administration and the Office of Personnel Management. In fact, the entire transition has taken a little over seven months -- again, a record of which to be proud!

So yes, today marks the final chapter in this long journey we have taken together -- what we've all been working for -- the curtain call for federal control of these airports. And I'm sure we'll all watch with more than a little pride as the future begins to unfold. I know Jim Wilding has been carrying a lot of ideas around in his head or on his charts for years -- well, now you've got the chance to put those plans into action!

It's up to the Authority Board and to the employees of the regional authority to make these airports fitting gateways to our nation's capital. The future is in your hands, your very capable hands. And knowing the

excellence of the Board and the airports' outstanding employees, you are, as the banner says, "off to a flying start." But you know I'm going to miss you guys who worked so hard for this transfer -- it's been a heck of a team -- let's have a reunion or two along the way!

From the bottom of my heart, thank you, thank you, for making a dream come true.

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