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REMARKS BY JOSEPH M. DEL BALZO
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AWARD PRESENTATION CEREMONY
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Ladies and Gentlemen.

We are here this afternoon to honor a very special person with a very special award. In just a few minutes, it will be my privilege to present the FAA's Distinguished Service Award to Malvern Gross, President and CEO of the National Aeronautic Association. It is an award rarely presented to anyone outside the agency and it is given only to those who represent the best among us.

There are few people who love aviation more than Mal Gross, and, through his leadership at the NAA, no one has done more to foster and advance the art, sport, and science of flying than he has done.

The NAA has been a part of aviation tradition for so long that most of us take it for granted. Since its founding in 1905 by the Wright Brothers and other aviation pioneers, it has become--not just our oldest--but our most prestigious aviation organization. Each year, NAA bestows some of the most coveted awards in our industry, and receiving one is like being inducted into the aviation hall of fame.

But NAA does much more than just give out awards. Anyone who has ever set an aviation record--or hopes to--knows that in order for it to be official, it must be observed, timed, and certified by NAA personnel.

But what most of us don't know is that three years ago, we came perilously close to losing this important part of our aviation heritage. Mal became the President of NAA at a very critical time in its history. Not only had it lost touch with the air sport organizations that make up its principal constituency, but it was tottering on the verge of bankruptcy.

Through cost reforms and effective fund-raising, Mal got the organization back on its feet financially. Then he set out to renew the relationships with the grass roots aviation organizations. Mal did more than simply turn NAA around, he brought about a major transformation. And, by his actions, he has kept alive a glorious tradition and preserved for us a vital national asset.

On behalf of the FAA and its 53,000 employees, it is my great pleasure to present this Distinguished Service Award to Malvern Gross for his insight, leadership, and promotion of air transportation in the U.S. and in the international arena.

Congratulations.