

STATEMENT OF SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION
WILLIAM T. COLEMAN, JR. ON THE CONCORDE DECISION
BEFORE THE HOUSE PUBLIC WORKS AND TRANSPORTATION
COMMITTEE, SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION, FEBRUARY 10, 1976.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I appreciate your invitation to appear to discuss my decision permitting British Airways and Air France to conduct limited scheduled Concorde operations to and from the United States for a trial period not to exceed 16 months under certain restrictions spelled out in my opinion.

The decision has not been easy. I know that many members of Congress will not entirely agree with it. I know that many who supported either unconditional permission for Concorde operations or an unconditional ban thereon will be disappointed. But I hope they will at least agree that I have acted responsibly, hearing both sides, weighing the often uncertain evidence, sorting through the sometimes conflicting statements, and trying ultimately to find the actual facts.

I also hope you have had an opportunity to read and reflect on my opinion. For there is a danger here, as in so many public controversies, that theories set forth as fact may persist even after the actual facts establish the contrary. You and I have a common obligation to seek out the facts, difficult as that task may be, and evaluate them rationally and fairly.

Justice Holmes once observed, "Every year if not every day we have to wager our salvation upon some prophesy based on imperfect knowledge."^{1/} There is wisdom here. But one should not wager his future, and surely not the future of his countrymen, on the basis of imperfect knowledge when the means exist for developing more perfect knowledge. There is simply so much on both sides of the equation that we do not know and cannot know without observing the Concorde in actual commercial operations into the United States that a firm decision at this time either to admit or to ban the Concorde would be irresponsible. It is for this reason that I have arrived at a decision that I am aware will not wholly delight anyone, and scheduled the limited experiment described in my opinion.

I would like at this time to distribute that opinion and the opening statement delivered at the press conference where I announced my decision. I shall be happy to try to answer any questions you have.

^{1/} Abrams v. United States, 250 U.S. 616, 630 (1919)
(dissenting opinion)