

STATEMENT OF PAUL BOHR, DIRECTOR, GREAT LAKES REGION, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS, SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES AND TRANSPORTATION, CONCERNING AIR TRAFFIC OPERATIONS AT O'HARE AIRPORT AND THE CHICAGO CENTER. FEBRUARY 27, 1987. CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am Paul Bohr, Director of the FAA's Great Lakes Region. I am responsible for FAA activities in Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, South Dakota, and North Dakota. I welcome the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee today to briefly describe operations at O'Hare Airport and at the FAA's Air Route Traffic Control Center located in Aurora. With me is Peter Salmon, Assistant Manager of our Air Traffic Division in the Great Lakes Region.

At the outset, before discussing the current staffing situation at O'Hare and the Chicago Center, I would like to publicly note the fine job done by our air traffic controllers at these facilities. These men and women consistently perform their jobs with the highest level of professionalism and safety in one of the most active air traffic environments in the world.

I would like to take a moment to describe that air traffic environment for you. In July 1981, average daily operations at O'Hare totaled 2,076 operations. In July 1986, that number had

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increased to 2,212 operations a day. We expect a slight increase in the future, and project average daily operations to reach the 2,290 level in July 1987. In July 1981, Center operations were 5,836; in July 1986, they had increased to 6,295, and we project average daily operations to reach 6,673 in July 1987.

At this time, I would like to emphasize one key point concerning Full Performance Level (FPL) controllers. Much focus has been placed on the numbers of FPL controllers at FAA facilities, which we track on the national level through an automated system that identifies as FPL's those controllers in a given facility who are at the journeyman grade for that facility (i.e., in our busiest facilities, GS-14 controllers would be identified by the automated system as FPL's). For internal day-to-day facility management purposes, however, our facilities track as FPL's those controllers who have attained both the journeyman grade in their respective facility, and have been certified on all of the positions of operation in their assigned area. The numbers we will use today represent the numbers used for internal facility management purposes.

It is important to recognize that we have always had controllers who have not attained FPL status, but who are highly qualified to perform the work of all of the positions on which they have been certified. Much productive air traffic control work is performed

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by these controllers, who, in a very real sense, are the equivalent of an FPL on each position for which they have been certified. Therefore, the number of FPL's in a facility is not an accurate measure of the total number of controllers in a facility who are qualified to independently control traffic. This is true, not only at O'Hare and the Chicago Center, but at other air traffic control facilities in the United States. I should also point out to the Subcommittee that our staffing situation at any facility is a highly dynamic one--numbers of FPL controllers or controllers in training change on a continual basis as we experience retirements, recruit new people, or certify controllers on new positions of operation.

With respect to O'Hare, we actually have two air traffic control facilities located there: The Tower Cab and the O'Hare Terminal Radar Approach Control (TRACON). Controllers are assigned to either the Tower Cab or the TRACON. Our authorized staffing for the Tower Cab is 36 controllers. We currently have 39 controllers on board of whom 27 are FPL controllers, 2 of whom are on detail to quality assurance and training positions. Twelve controllers are in various stages of training and development.

Our authorized staffing for the TRACON is 66 controllers. We currently have 53 controllers on board, of whom 34 are FPL's, 2 of whom are on detail to quality assurance and training positions.

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Nineteen controllers are in various stages of training and development.

The Tower Cab and TRACON combined are authorized 19 Air Traffic Assistants or ATA's. We currently have on board 16 ATA's who rotate between the Tower and the TRACON. Air Traffic Assistants perform some duties and work of lesser complexity, which before 1982 was performed by higher graded controller personnel.

Our authorized staffing at the Chicago Center consists of 384 controllers. We currently have 350 controllers on board, of which 121 are FPL's and 229 are in various stages of training and development. The number of ATA's authorized at the Center is 50. We currently have 38 ATA's on board.

All of the controllers we bring into O'Hare are highly qualified controllers and many have years of FPL service at other FAA facilities before being selected to work at O'Hare. An individual is initially assigned to O'Hare as less than an FPL controller since that individual would not be certified on all assigned positions within the new facility. We are continuing efforts to identify good candidates for assignment to O'Hare, and we have made solid progress in our rebuilding efforts at the facility. In fact, our goal is to certify an additional 12 FPL controllers in

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the Tower Cab and 12 in the TRACON during this calendar year.

At the Chicago Center, we fill controller positions both at the entry level and by reassignment of controllers at higher grade levels from other facilities. We will continue our efforts this year toward increasing the number of FPL controllers at the Center as well.

In fiscal year 1985, 20,076 hours of overtime were worked at O'Hare and 51,504 at the Chicago Center. In 1986, the amount of overtime decreased to 11,065 hours at O'Hare and to 24,404 at the Center. Our approach is to schedule overtime only for individuals who wish to work overtime, although that is not always feasible. We continually assess our overtime requirements, and it is a priority of ours to assure that no individual is required to work an excessive schedule that could compromise safety.

With respect to near midair collisions (NMAC), since 1985 there have been 21 NMAC's declared in the Chicago area under the control of O'Hare which have been reported to the FAA. The majority of events (19 of the 21) involved a conflict between one aircraft operating under Instrument Flight Rules (under positive control) and one aircraft that was operating under Visual Flight Rules and, therefore, not in contact with Air Traffic Control; there were 7 in 1985 and 12 in 1986.

Over that 2-year period, only 1 air traffic controller operational error was associated with a reported NMAC. I can assure you though, that NMAC's remain a concern to the FAA in Chicago, and throughout the country as well. We are continually taking steps to improve the air traffic control equipment and procedures, as well as the skill levels of people who operate or use the air traffic control system. Here in the Great Lakes Region, for example, in 1986, we conducted a number of safety seminars in which we emphasized collision avoidance. Over 750 pilots attended those seminars. This topic, along with Terminal Control Airspace (TCA) regulations and procedures, is emphasized at all accident prevention seminars. In those NMAC's involving a violation of the regulations, and in which we are able to identify the violator, we initiate enforcement action. In the majority of cases the enforcement action results in a suspension of the pilot's certificate for a period of time. In each of the 3 NMAC's reported in 1986, which were identified as involving Federal Aviation Regulation violations, enforcement action has been taken. Our analysis has shown that some NMAC's are the result of violations of TCA procedures. Since January of this year, we have implemented a program to observe and record TCA violations on a regular basis to establish base-line data to better analyze the causes of this type of violation. Furthermore, charting for the 23 TCA's around the country is being reviewed for, among other things, accuracy and simplicity, so that confusion on the part of

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pilots operating in or near TCA's will be minimized. The Chicago TCA is part of this effort.

In addition, both O'Hare and Chicago Center are constantly in the process of reviewing procedures in an effort to reduce operational errors, and, specifically with respect to O'Hare, operational errors that are also surface errors. For example, at O'Hare we have developed a plan which specifically addresses reemphasized areas of responsibility, not only for controllers, but for the entire facility, as well as the manning of the Tower Cab coordinator position during peak periods of traffic and a mandatory position relief overlap period. At Chicago Center we continually study the capacity, workload, and complexity of each sector within the Center and reroute scheduled flights to distribute the workload more evenly. The Center has also developed a process in which experienced FPL's review past operational errors in an effort to identify the causes of those errors and make recommendations as to how procedures or work habits can be modified or improved to prevent future errors.

As noted, in addition to the regional efforts, the FAA nationally is focusing on ways to simplify TCA airspace and make it more readily identifiable to private pilots. Moreover, FAA efforts to develop a collision avoidance system continue as a high priority, and the Administrator has announced his intention to propose a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking later this year requiring airlines

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to install TCAS II, a collision avoidance system which provides the pilot with both traffic advisories and ascend or descend instructions to avoid other aircraft that are equipped with transponders.

In closing, Madam Chairwoman, I would like to note that air traffic control work in the Chicago area is not an easy task. It is both challenging and demanding. We are working aggressively to improve upon the good system we have in place with a view towards achieving even greater safety and efficiency.

That completes my prepared statement. Mr. Salmon and I would be pleased to respond to any questions you may have at this time.

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