

**OPENING STATEMENT OF  
HONORABLE JAMES L. OBERSTAR  
BEFORE THE HOUSE AVIATION SUBCOMMITTEE  
THE NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD'S  
MOST WANTED AVIATION SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS  
JUNE 6, 2007**

- I want to thank Chairman Costello and Ranking Member Petri for calling today's hearing on *The National Transportation Safety Board's Most Wanted Aviation Safety Improvements*.
- The National Transportation Safety Board's (NTSB) roots stem as far back as 1926 when the Air Commerce Act vested the Department of Commerce with the authority to investigate aircraft accidents. During the 1966 consolidation of transportation agencies into the Department of Transportation (DOT), the NTSB was created as an independent agency within DOT to investigate accidents in all transportation modes.
- In 1974, the NTSB continued to retain its independence when Congress re-established the NTSB as a separate entity distinct from DOT. Since that time, the NTSB has investigated almost 130,000 aviation accidents. The NTSB's tireless efforts in investigating accidents and issuing recommendations have led to innovative safety enhancements, such as manual cutoff switches for airbags, measures to prevent runway incursions, and countermeasures against operator fatigue in all modes of transportation. The American traveling public is much safer today due to the hard work of the NTSB staff in conducting investigations and pursuing safety recommendations.
- In 1990, the NTSB first issued its Most Wanted Safety Improvements. Unfortunately, human fatigue and airport runway incursions were on the list in 1990 and they are still on the list in 2007. The 2007 NTSB's Most Wanted aviation safety improvements also includes aircraft icing, fuel tank flammability, improved audio and data recorders, and part 135 crew resource management.
- The fact that six of the fourteen NTSB Most Wanted safety improvements are aviation-related is troublesome given that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) predicts one billion U.S. passengers by 2015. The U.S. cannot afford to be anything less than vigilant with regard to the flying public's safety. We owe it to the families of the victims of previous accidents, many of whom are represented here today by the National Air Disaster Alliance/Foundation. We

must learn from their loss, so that other families do not lose loved ones from similar accidents in the future.

- One of the most critical issues facing all flight crew today is fatigue, especially with increased fuel costs and the air carrier's emphasis on increasing productivity and driving down labor costs. We need to be mindful of this important issue as it pertains to all aviation professionals, from pilots to controllers, to flight attendants and mechanics. Working long hours on an irregular schedule can have a destructive effect on decision-making abilities.
- Vince Lombardi was well known for his comment "Fatigue makes cowards of us all." What he meant was it weakens all of your senses, all of your reaction times, all of your ability to perform at the highest level. As I have repeatedly said: Fatigue does not show up in autopsies! Our nation's aviation professionals must be provided adequate rest to perform their critical safety functions. Anything less is simply not acceptable!
- Seventeen years ago, the NTSB called upon the Department of Transportation (DOT) – including the FAA – to review its current hours-of-service regulatory schemes to ensure that the latest scientific research on fatigue and research had been incorporated. Progress on FAA's proposed 1995 overhaul to its flight and duty regulations for pilots has essentially stopped under the Bush Administration.
- More recently, on April 10, 2007, the NTSB issued two recommendations to the FAA to work with the controllers union to revise controller work-scheduling policies to provide for adequate rest periods, and to develop fatigue awareness and countermeasures training program for controllers and controller-schedulers.
- Having well-rested aviation personnel is critical to aviation safety. It is time to refocus our efforts and press the FAA to resolve these very significant and complex fatigue issues. I look forward to hearing more about the FAA's plans on this important issue.
- Chairman Costello, thank you again for having this hearing. We have a well-trained NTSB workforce protecting the American traveling public by making safety recommendations. But without implementing their recommendations we only have the warning and not the protection the traveling public deserves.