

**OPENING STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE JERRY F. COSTELLO
AVIATION SUBCOMMITTEE
RUNWAY SAFETY: AN UPDATE
SEPTEMBER 25, 2008**

➤ I want to welcome everyone to our hearing today on Runway Safety: An Update.

➤ Runway safety continues to be an aviation safety concern, appearing on the National Transportation Safety Board's (NTSB) Most Wanted List since the List was created in 1990.

While we will hear from the FAA and others today that the United States has the safest air transportation system in the world, we cannot become complacent about safety -- one accident or near accident is one too many.

➤ According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the overall rate for runway incursions for the first three quarters of 2008 has increased slightly compared to 2007.

That, in conjunction with three near misses within three weeks over the summer at two of our busiest airports and one last Friday at Lehigh Valley International Airport, causes me concern. Especially with operations decreasing almost 3 percent in the first 6 months of 2008 compared with 2007, according to the FAA.

- At our February 2008 hearing on runway safety, I requested quarterly reports from the FAA on runway safety to ensure this issue remains at the top of FAA's agenda. Further, while I am pleased that the FAA has filled its Runway Safety Office Director position and taken many of the recommendations from the GAO, I want to know what the FAA's plan is to improve runway safety, given the rate increase.

- The GAO also cites human factors, such as controller fatigue and miscommunication, as factors in runway safety, and I am interested in hearing more from the panelists, including Pat Forrey, President of the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, on this issue.

- As our June 2008 hearing demonstrated, we have a controller staffing shortage and the FAA has been slow to acknowledge we have a problem and find a solution. As a result, controllers are being asked to work longer hours to handle increasingly congested runways and airspace. And, according to GAO, by 2011 up to 50 percent of the controller workforce will have less than 5 years experience, which could affect runway safety.

➤ The near miss last Friday clearly demonstrates how staffing has an effect on safety. According to some reports, the Lehigh Valley International Airport near miss was a result of an inexperienced controller, or trainee, allowing both aircraft on the same runway. Those planes missed colliding by about 10 feet. We need to do more on runway safety now to avoid a catastrophe in the future.

➤ I am also interested in learning more about the implementation and use of technologies such as the Airport Surface Detection Equipment, Model X, (ASDE-X), runway safety lights and low-cost surveillance systems and I am pleased the Dallas Fort Worth Airport is here to give us their perspective on these technologies.

➤ While the House of Representatives provided \$42 million for runway incursion reduction programs; \$74 million for runway status light acquisition and installation; and required the FAA to submit a Runway Safety Plan that includes a roadmap for the installation and deployment of systems to alert controllers and flight crews in H.R. 2881, the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2007, -- the Senate has failed to act on that legislation. The House will continue to keep pressure on our colleagues in the Senate to act this year, and we will continue to provide oversight and interest on this issue until these provisions become law.

➤ As I have stated time and again, safety must not be compromised in an effort to save money or for a lack of resources and attention. The FAA, and the entire aviation community, must work together so that we can do better to

➤ With that, I want to again welcome the witnesses today and I look forward to your testimony.

➤ Before I recognize Mr. Petri for his opening statement, I ask unanimous consent to allow 2 weeks for all Members to revise and extend their remarks and to permit the submission of additional statements and materials by Members and witnesses. Without objection, so ordered.