

July 25 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1996

The President. I will have a statement after we meet this morning, and I'd prefer to wait and answer all my questions then.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 9:40 a.m. in Port Authority Building 14 at John F. Ken-

nedy International Airport. In his remarks, the President referred to Ambassadors Francois Bujon de l'Estang of France and Ferdinando Salleo of Italy. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks Announcing Measures To Improve Aviation Safety and Security in Jamaica, New York

July 25, 1996

Good afternoon. Hillary and I have just met with the families of those who lost their lives on TWA Flight 800. I'd like to talk a little about that meeting and describe for you the immediate steps I have ordered to improve airline safety and security.

These families had suffered enormous pain, the loss of a parent, a child, a husband, a wife, a brother, a nephew, a niece. They were still in a great deal of pain, and I know that we can all understand not only their pain but the frustration that they feel at the time it is taking to recover their loved ones and to get answers.

I also want you to know, however, that an awful lot of them expressed gratitude to me for the efforts that are being made by the Government personnel, the TWA personnel assigned to the families, and the many volunteers who are working hard to make this awful experience at least bearable for them.

We have listened to the victims' families. While much has been done by many to assist them, they believe, and I agree, that there should be in place in the Federal Government a specific office that has the responsibility and the capability to assist victims' families in tragedies like this one. That is the case where FEMA does the work when there are natural disasters; it was the case in Oklahoma City. That is not the case today with regard to airline crashes. And I intend to work with Congress to see that it does happen.

We do not yet know what caused Flight 800 to crash, whether it was mechanical failure or sabotage, but we will find out. Just last night the divers who were braving the waters of the Atlantic to search for answers recovered both flight data recorders. Our experts are analyzing

their contents at this very moment. This is a major step toward unraveling the mystery of Flight 800. In the meantime, let me again ask every American not to jump to conclusions.

This investigation is moving forward with great care and even greater determination. While we seek the cause of the disaster, let us all agree that we must not wait to alleviate the concerns of the American people about air safety and air security. In the wake of the ValuJet crash and TWA 800, that concern has increased. The safety record of the United States aviation is unmatched in the world, and air travel remains the safest means of transportation. But that is of no consolation when a single crash, whatever its cause, can take so many lives.

Beginning in 1993, our administration took steps to improve aviation safety and security. We proposed a detailed plan to overhaul and modernize the air traffic control system. We worked with the airline industry to identify and correct safety problems. We hired more than 200 safety inspectors, and we're budgeted for 258 more. We've issued uniform safety standards. We began field testing new high-tech explosive detection machines in San Francisco and Atlanta. And we very much hope we can work through the problems with those machines and bring them on-line in all airports in the near future. We significantly increased security vigilance at our airports. And the FAA created a new Government and industry panel to review and improve airport security and airline security.

Today I'm announcing new measures to increase the safety and security of air travel. First, I have ordered the Secretary of Transportation to issue new directives on airline security that

cover international and domestic flights and apply to passengers and to cargo. From now on, we will hand-search more luggage and screen more bags. And we will require preflight inspections for any plane flying to or from the United States, every plane, every cabin, every cargo hold, every time.

Second, I have asked Vice President Gore to take charge of a commission to review aviation safety, security, and the pace of modernization of the air traffic control system, a subject that he and his reinventing Government task force have been working on for more than 3 years now. The Gore commission will work with the National Transportation Safety Board, the Departments of Transportation and Justice, industry advisory groups, and concerned non-governmental organizations. The Vice President will report his initial findings of aviation security to me in 45 days, including an action plan to deploy new high-technology inspection machines that can detect the most sophisticated explosives.

I want to stress again, we do not know why TWA Flight 800 crashed. If it proves to be a mechanical failure, additional safety measures may be required. If it proves to be a criminal act, other security steps may be required. Whatever needs to be done, we will do it. I will

use the full powers of the Presidency. And if congressional authorization is required, I am certain we will have full bipartisan congressional support.

The steps we are taking today and others we may take in the future could increase the inconvenience and the expense of air travel. I want the American people to know that up front. We'll do everything we can to minimize these costs, but the safety and security of the American people must be our top priority.

We're privileged to live in a time of great possibility and great opportunities for mobility for our people and people throughout the world. But we know that these times are not free of peril. Our responsibility now as Americans is to pull together and work together to solve the problems of tragedies like TWA Flight 800; to support their families with our thoughts, our prayers, and where we can, our tangible support; and to do whatever is necessary to look out for the security and the safety of the American people and its aviation system.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:10 p.m. in Hangar 12 at the John F. Kennedy International Airport.

Statement on Senate Action on Health Care and Minimum Wage Legislation *July 25, 1996*

I am pleased that the Senate has broken the gridlock and appointed conferees to deal with two of my highest priorities to help working families: health care and the minimum wage. I commend the leadership of both parties who have diligently worked to reach this point.

The Kassebaum-Kennedy bill will allow American workers the security of knowing that they will not lose their health coverage if they change their jobs. We now have the opportunity to

move forward and enact real health insurance reform this year.

Raising the minimum wage for millions of America's hardest workers is also the right thing to do. Working parents simply cannot support a family on \$4.25 an hour.

I urge the conferees to take swift action on these two important measures before the August recess. America's working families deserve nothing less.