

And Laura and I strongly support these programs.

It is now my privilege to present the National Medals of Art and the National Humanities Medals. Once again, I congratulate our honorees, because in your work, we see the creativity of the American spirit and the values that have made our Nation great.

And so now I ask the military aide to read the citations.

[At this point, Lt. Cmdr. Dan Walsh, USCG, Coast Guard Aide to the President,

read the citations, and the President presented the medals.]

The President. My wife.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:03 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Lynne V. Cheney, wife of Vice President Dick Cheney. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Secretary of Transportation Mary E. Peters and Federal Aviation Administration Acting Administrator Robert A. Sturgell
November 15, 2007

Thanksgiving is a week from today, and Christmas will quickly follow. This is really a time of joy for our families. Unfortunately, this is also a season of dread for too many Americans. Holiday travelers faced with the prospect of long-delayed and canceled flights and lost baggage and other problems have become all too often an occurrence. In other words, there's a lot of people that are worried about traveling because they've had unpleasant experiences when they've been flying around the country.

And so this is a topic that I've just discussed with Secretary of Transportation Mary Peters and the Acting Administrator of the FAA, Bobby Sturgell. It's one thing to analyze the problem, but the American people expect us to come up with some solutions. And that's what we've been talking about. And one of the reasons we have a sense of urgency about this issue is that these problems that we've been discussing are clear to anybody who has been traveling. Airports are very crowded; travelers are being stranded; and flights are delayed,

sometimes with a full load of passengers sitting on the runway for hours. These failures carry some real costs for the country, not just in the inconvenience they cause, but in the business they obstruct and family gatherings they cause people to miss.

We can do better. We can have an aviation system that is improved. And that's what we're talking about. Secretary Peters and Acting Administrator Sturgell have been working with the airline industry on practical improvements. I want to announce a series of preliminary actions to help address the epidemic of aviation delays.

First, the military will make available some of its airspace over the east coast for use by civilian airliners this Thanksgiving. These new routes will help relieve air congestion from Maine to Florida for nearly 5 full days surrounding the holiday.

Second, the FAA is taking new measures to head off delays. Bobby Sturgell will impose a holiday moratorium on all non-essential projects so that the FAA can focus its personnel and equipment exclusively on keeping flights on time. The FAA is also

partnering with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to reduce bottlenecks in the New York metro area, which is the source of most chronic delays.

Third, the Department of Transportation and the FAA are encouraging airlines to take their own measures to prevent delays. I'm pleased to get the report from Secretary Peters and Acting Administrator Sturgell. Airlines have agreed to make more staff available to expedite check-in and boarding, to set aside extra seats and even extra planes to help accommodate passengers affected by cancellations and delays. They agreed to bring in additional ticket kiosks and baggage handling gear as well as rolling staircases.

Fourth, the Federal Government is using the Internet to provide real-time updates on flight delays. People in America have got to know there's a web site called fly.faa.gov; that's where the FAA transmits information on airport backups directly to passengers and their families. If you're interested in making sure that your plans can—aren't going to be disrupted, you can get on the web site of fly.faa.gov. As well, if you want to, you can sign up to receive delay notices on your mobile phones. In other words, part of making sure people are not inconvenienced is there to be good transmission of sound, real-time information.

Fifth, we're proposing new regulations to help ensure that airline passengers are treated fairly. We're proposing to double the amount of compensation passengers receive when they're forced off overbooked flights. For example, a passenger forced to wait more than 2 hours for another flight would receive a minimum of \$800 under our idea, instead of the current \$400. We want people who are responsible for moving passengers to understand that there will be consequences for these delays, all aiming to get the system to work better.

We're proposing a requirement that airlines collect better data on flight delays and provide that data to the Department of

Transportation. We're evaluating a number of other recommendations for the airlines, including mandatory contingency plans to aid stranded passengers and penalties for chronically delayed flights.

Finally, the Department of Transportation and the FAA are working on innovative ways to reduce congestion in the long run. While short-term improvements in flight operations and passenger treatment can help, they do not cure the underlying problem. In certain parts of our country, the demand for air service exceeds the available supply. As a result, airlines are scheduling more arrivals and departures than airports can possibly handle, and passengers are paying the price in backups and delays.

The key to solving this problem is managing the demand for flights at overloaded airports, and there are a variety of tools to do this in a fair and efficient way. For example, fees could be higher at peak hours and at crowded airports, or takeoff and landing rights could be auctioned to the highest value flights. Market-based incentives like these would encourage airlines to spread out their flights more evenly during the day, to make better use of neighboring airports, and to move the maximum number of passengers as quickly and efficiently as possible.

This concept is called congestion pricing. It has shown results in other areas of our economy; in other words, other parts of our economy use congestion pricing. Some States offer discounts to drivers who use E-ZPass, which reduces long waits at the toll plaza. Phone and electricity companies balance supply and demand by adjusting their rates during peak usage hours. Applying congestion pricing to the aviation industry has the potential to make today's system more predictable, more reliable, and more convenient for the travelers. Over the past 7 weeks, Federal officials have raised this idea with airlines and airport representatives in the New York area. And I've asked Secretary Peters and Acting Administrator

Sturgell to report back to me about those discussions next month.

My administration will work swiftly to carry out the measures I've announced today. But to reform our aviation system in a way American consumers deserve, we need action from the United States Congress. In February, my administration sent Congress an FAA modernization bill that would improve the aviation system for all involved. The bill would upgrade aviation technology by adopting a safer and more automated air travel control system based on GPS technology, instead of the radar and radio-based systems designed during World War II.

In other words, if we really want to solve this problem, it's time for Congress to modernize the FAA, and we've given them a blueprint to do so. The bill would employ market pricing to reduce congestion and ensure that airports manage their schedules

efficiently. The bill would establish a new financing mechanism and governing structure to ensure that these reforms are carried out in wise and cost-effective ways.

There are people in Congress who understand the need to act, starting with Senators Trent Lott and Senator Jay Rockefeller. They're leaders in this area of modernization of our—of the FAA. They understand that business as usual is not good enough for American travelers. And so do I, and so does my administration.

I look forward to working with them to get a good bill passed as soon as possible. By working together, we can restore the confidence of America's consumers, improve the efficiency of America's airports, and bring order to America's skies.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:26 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

Remarks at the Federalist Society's 25th Annual Gala Dinner *November 15, 2007*

Thank you all very much. Thank you. So much for the dress code. [*Laughter*] I'm honored to be with you. Thanks. I appreciate being with an organization that understands the value of free speech, so much so that Gene asked if I'd give one. [*Laughter*] I told him I'd be happy, but I warned him that if you invite me back for the 30th anniversary, it's going to cost some billable hours. [*Laughter*]

In just a quarter century, the Federalist Society has transformed itself from a student organization into a vital national institution. You've earned a reputation across the ideological spectrum for open debate and intellectual rigor. Members of the Federalist Society believe in a simple proposition: Our written Constitution means what it says. One would not call that a radical statement. I certainly don't see how holding

such a commonsense view could be considered controversial. I share your devotion to the Constitution, and I'm proud to be standing with you tonight.

I was also proud to stand yesterday at the Department of Justice with America's new Attorney General, Michael Mukasey. Attorney General Mukasey is a decent man, an outstanding lawyer, and a strong leader, and he needs a strong team to support him at the Department of Justice. And so in consultation with the Attorney General, earlier today I announced the individuals I will nominate to serve in five senior positions. And I look forward to working with the United States Senate to fill these positions as quickly as possible.

I'm proud to be in such distinguished company as Justice Antonin Scalia and, of course, Maureen. I'm proud to be here