

Mr. THOMPSON. Mr. Secretary, I have had some discussions with some of the officials of various airlines throughout the country and they point out to me that they are extremely safety conscious; that the aircraft they are flying, these jets, are \$5, \$6, \$7 million, and when you get to the jumbos they are going up to \$15 million apiece; that they do everything possible within their company to maintain safety and in many of the cases the officials feel they are more safety conscious than the FAA personnel.

Another point is that an accident, an aircraft accident, is going to affect monetarily that company's business—not just the loss of the aircraft and the liability. So they are very concerned about aviation safety. I have had some who have expressed the concern that the FAA does have this job but oftentimes they are just trying to find some work to do; that they are out there and the airlines feel as though they are doing a superb job in handling safety themselves and then the FAA people come in and they want to justify their jobs and their positions so, therefore, they are nitpicking in many instances.

Secretary BOYD. I would dispute that with all of the vigor that I have, Mr. Thompson. I would certainly call on any airline who feels that progress in safety is being impeded by actions of the Federal Aviation Administration. I would suggest they get in touch with General McKee.

Mr. THOMPSON. I did not say impeded.

General McKEE. I have had a contact with all the airlines in the country and I have never had one come in and complain about safety aspects and actions we have taken with respect to their airlines. They are not a bit hesitant, Mr. Thompson, to complain when they have complaints. I get them every day.

Mr. THOMPSON. My point is simply this: That I have been told by several airline executives—not the presidents of the companies—that the safety programs they themselves have indicate they are more concerned with safety than even the FAA is, and in their opinion, if left to their own devices, their operation would be every bit as safe as it is now with the FAA safety inspectors.

Now, the reason I got into this, of course, was in the training of the safety inspectors, and the question I had on whether it would be better for the airlines to do this under contract with the FAA or for the FAA to maintain the fleet of jet aircraft that they do have to train their own safety inspectors, and it was very interesting that most of the airlines feel as though they are extremely safety conscious.

General McKEE. But there is a fundamental issue here, Mr. Thompson. You have to remember that the law charges the Administrator of the FAA, whoever he happens to be, with the safety of this operation. Now, the only way that we can get rid of that is for you people up here to change the law and say the airlines will be completely responsible for the safety of their operation.

But, when we have an accident, they don't go to that airline. The airline president doesn't get investigated; it is the Administrator of the FAA. "Did you do what you were supposed to do? Did you run these inspections? Did you assure that that airplane was crash-worthy? Did you assure that that crew passed all the tests?" I go through this every time there is a major accident.