

U.S. Senator Elizabeth Dole
Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
Introduction of William Cobey
April 12, 2005

Remarks : As Prepared

Chairman Stevens and Ranking Member Inouye, it gives me great pleasure, and it is indeed an honor, to introduce this morning, Bill Cobey, nominated to serve as a member of the Washington Airports Authority Board. Bill has demonstrated a long and dedicated commitment to public service over the years for his home state of North Carolina and our nation.

Without a doubt, one of the most rewarding and challenging projects I chose to undertake while serving as Secretary of Transportation was the task of moving National and Dulles International airports out of the Federal Government.

National was a rather shabby, small gateway to the nation's capital, and following airline deregulation, Dulles was desperately in need of expansion.

I will never forget the night in 1984, when my husband and I were having a little pillow talk, and I told him of my conviction that it was time for Uncle Sam to "Free the Airports."

Bob's reaction? "Forget it, Elizabeth. It's been tried eight times since 1949. It never came out of Committee..." and he rolled over and went to sleep! Mr. Chairman, as far as I was concerned, the gauntlet had been thrown down. I later found that Bob was absolutely correct in predicting the journey to regional control would be a very tough one, but after three years of dedicated effort from a talented team, and your help, Mr. Chairman, and that of Senator Inouye, it passed both houses of Congress and was signed into law by President Reagan.

Our plan certainly worked. In 1987, independent operation of Washington's two airports became a successful partnership. The airports were able to raise the necessary funds through sales of tax free bonds to give them funding for necessary capital improvements and expansions.

Today Washington's two airports serve 39 million passengers annually with 1,069 daily flights to over 100 destinations throughout the United States and 36 countries worldwide. It is the responsibility of the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority Board to oversee the airports and their security, safety, development, and maintenance. I commend the board for their excellence in handling the more than 100,000 passengers that use the two airports on a daily basis. And I thank you Mr. Chairman, for all your help in creating this board. You signed the cloture petition for the enabling legislation. And you "Hulk'ed" the provision through on an omnibus bill. Without your leadership we would not be having this hearing today. And Senator Inouye, I thank you for your hard work in making that bill a bipartisan effort which has indeed made air travel to and from our nation's capital far easier and less expensive.

I know that Bill Cobey would be a wonderful asset and addition to the Airports Authority Board. Bill has served his state and nation in many different capacities, and has an outstanding list of accomplishments.

He received his undergraduate education from Emory University in Atlanta and then earned an M.B.A. from the prestigious Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania and an M.Ed. in health and physical education from the University of Pittsburgh. Prior to representing North Carolina in the US Congress for one term, Bill served as Governor Jim Martin's Deputy Secretary of Transportation and then as Secretary of North Carolina's Department of Environment, Health, and Natural Resources.

A devoted husband, father and grandfather, Bill is a man I am proud to call my friend – a man of tremendous character, a man committed to making our country better. I am confident that the board and the country will benefit from his service.

I thank you for this opportunity to express my admiration and respect for Bill Cobey and to present him to the Committee.