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UNO AVIATION INSTITUTE FOUNDING DIRECTOR RECOMMENDS CREATION OF U.S. NATIONAL AVIATION COMMISSION

OMAHA — Woodland, Calif.,-based aerospace lecturer William F. Shea recommended President Bush and Congress to establish a National Aviation Commission during recent lectures at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO). Shea, founding director of the UNO Aviation Institute and a former Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) associate administrator for airports, was on campus Nov. 29 to attend the UNO Aviation Institute's annual Charles W. Durham Distinguished Guest Lecture Series.

The Aviation Institute holds the Durham Lecture every year and presents the guest speaker with the William F. Shea Distinguished Contribution to Aviation Award. This award is given in honor of Shea and is presented to those who have impacted the aviation industry during their varied aviation careers. This year's recipient is Vern Raburn, president and CEO of Eclipse Aviation Corporation.

While on campus, Shea also spoke to several classes of aviation students. At the lectures, he stressed that America's aviation industry is in serious crisis, and high-level leadership and authority is needed to turn the industry around.

He outlined the following points in his speeches:

“It is in the national interest to do so. The \$12 trillion civil aviation industry needs to regain its direction. Some airlines are in bankruptcy, congestion and gridlock is increasing and only one major commercial airline aircraft manufacturer is left in the U.S. Regional jets are manufactured in Brazil and Canada - not in the U.S. There is a national debate about the need and impacts of foreign ownership and control of U.S. airlines.

“The U.S. is losing its worldwide aviation position due to fractionated policies, poor planning and a lack of policy and vision,” he said.

Shea recommended the creation of a seven-member commission called “The U.S. National Aviation Commission.” The commission would report to the President and Congress. Its goal would be to provide direction, vision, policy and promotion of the U.S. aviation industry. As a result, the FAA would be removed from USDOT and report to the new commission. Also, all aviation activity being conducted in other federal agencies would be transferred to the new commission.”

“Its creation would provide more concentrated and focused leadership with appropriate authority, and recognition is needed to bring change and advance the U.S. aviation industry in America and the world,” he said. “Today's airports are too few, and capacity is limited. The only real way to increase capacity is to build more airports. The commission would not only assure the U.S. aviation industry is advanced and promoted worldwide but would also assure a visionary 21st Century Aviation System that includes new airports in the long term as a part of the vision.”

Shea pointed to the following statements published by the Joint Planning and Development Office (JPDO) and National Academic Press, which confirmed his call for stronger leadership and direction in the form of a commission in developing a nationwide system. JPDO's Web site states: “Today's aviation system cannot meet 21st century needs. That was the conclusion of numerous studies and blue ribbon panels, including - most recently - the National Research Council and Commission on the Future of the U.S. Aerospace Industry.

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It cannot enhance, let alone restore, America's international leadership in aviation and aerospace. Given these challenges, piecemeal solutions or tinkering at the margins will not work. The future demands nothing less and the complete transformation of the U.S. air system."

Another support of Shea's proposal can be found in the National Academic Press Report, titled "Securing the Future of the U.S. Air Transportation: A System in Peril." The report says: "No single organization has the responsibility and the authority for developing a comprehensive solution to the challenges faced by the U.S. air transportation system. Strong, focused leadership is needed. Federal leadership should be exercised by an agency or office with (1) responsibility, authority and financial resources necessary for defining air transportation system architectures through a centralized planning function, (2) an understanding of demand, and economic factors, and (3) the credibility and objectivity to garner the active support of other air transportation stakeholders in government, industry and the general public. This requires, among other things, a leadership group composed of individuals with a broad aviation perspective and a willingness to accept the risks of (1) looking ahead and (2) allowing others to help define the future."

He concluded by saying that the same national emphasis and priority given to fixing America's highway problems in 1956 should be given to fixing America's aviation problems today. "A system of new airports that overlays and supplements the existing airport system, similar to the way the Interstate Highway System does for highways, is needed to provide capacity to satisfy Long Term (40-year) nationwide aviation system growth," he said. "(JPDO) is requested to consider the Wayports Concept for inclusion in their Next Generation Air Transportation System Plan. Wayports is a nationwide system of airports integrated with enroute and terminal air traffic control, highways and rail that creates an Interstate Aviation System." Detailed information, compiled by a former FAA manager, can be found on the Web at www.wayports.com.

Shea holds an A.A.E, B.A. and M.Ed. He has held several positions and memberships on committees, including director of aviation, Port of Portland, Ore.; Commissioner of Aviation (Transportation), Binghamton, N.Y.; Yolo County (Calif.) Transportation Advisory Committee; First Chief for California Aeronautics Division (CALTARNS); and past president of the World Aviation Education Organization. He also served in the U.S. Air Force.

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