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Statement in the Hilo Service Case

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STATEMENT BY THE HONORABLE SPARK M. MATSUNAGA, MEMBER OF CONGRESS FROM HAWAII, IN THE HILO SERVICE CASE, DOCKET 28043, BEFORE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE ROBERT L. PARK, CIVIL AERONAUTICS BOARD, AT HEARINGS HELD IN HILO, HAWAII

Wednesday, February 11, 1976

My name is Spark Matsunaga. I am presently serving as a member of Congress from Hawaii's First Congressional District. Because I once served as a Congressman-at-Large from Hawaii, I am familiar with the questions relating to the growth and development of the County of Hawaii and, in particular, with the need for adequate and dependable air service at Hilo. The County of Hawaii, including the city of Hilo, is not within my congressional district.

Hilo, Hawaii today is in the unenviable status of a city, probably the only one in the United States, which is unserved by five major U. S. airlines which have sought, and been awarded, CAB authority to serve that important gateway in the Island State. Three of these air carriers have never used that authority; they now ask that they be allowed to continue the postponement of the starting date of their service. The other two carriers, having once used their Hilo service authority, had asked, and been granted, authority to suspend such service; they, too, would like to have the status quo continued.

It is incomprehensible that these five U. S. air carriers would file, as they did, applications for CAB authority to postpone inauguration of service or to continue

suspension of service, as the case may be, instead of requesting that their authority to serve Hilo be terminated. The question at once suggests itself: What are these carriers waiting for -- better times? If so, who, if not these carriers, are in the best position to help bring such better times to the County of Hawaii?

Certain industries on the Island of Hawaii (Big Island) are particularly dependent for their continued solvency and growth on adequate and reliable air transportation to and from the mainland United States. These industries include papaya, macadamia nut, guava, cut flowers and foliage. As export commodities, these products have met favorable market acceptance in the continental United States; their growth potential is practically unlimited.

Particularly noteworthy is the phenomenal growth in recent years of the papaya industry and the ornamental horticultural industry group consisting of cut flowers (anthuriums, orchids), nursery products and foliages. More than 85 percent of the total State production of papaya is from the Puna area of the Big Island. In the last 10 years, the value of sales of this popular fruit has increased from $829,000 to over $4 million. In terms of weight, this represents growth from one million pounds of exports to more than 21 million pounds.

With the anticipated Food and Drug Administration

approval in the near future of a papaya irradiation process which will retain the palatability and texture of the fruit and yet make it safe for human consumption, there is great promise that export quantities of papaya can be increased substantially over present levels, assuming that there is sufficient air transportation available to speed the fruit to expanding mainland markets.

The Hawaiian cut-flower and nursery stock industry, centered in the County of Hawaii, is in danger of retarded growth after a beginning that was marked by great promise. Ironically, the domestic air carriers which had helped to catapult this new Hawaiian enterprise into a four-million-dollar industry are now posing the principal threat to its continued growth. Unless there is adequate Hilo-mainland air service, the current aggressive marketing program to increase gross sales of anthuriums by 20 percent, for example, would be nonproductive. Then, too, the travel interest that is evoked by Hawaiian anthuriums and orchids which are marketed on the mainland cannot be overestimated.

From a position of minor importance to the County of Hawaii, tourism has grown to be an industry of considerable importance. It is estimated that today tourism accounts for over 12 percent of employment in the private sector. A little over 10 years ago, Hawaii County's hotel rooms totaled a modest 865. Today, there are over 5,300 rooms. Over the

same period, visitor arrivals in the County increased from 126,330 to 742,839. Remarkable as the increase in the number of visitor arrivals has been, it still has not kept pace with hotel room construction. Against the 488 percent increase in visitor arrivals, hotel room construction increased by 518 percent, resulting in a falling hotel room occupancy rate which today stands at the unsatisfactory level of about 60 percent.

Westbound commercial aircraft from the continental United States brings not only tourists to the County of Hawaii, a place of remarkable natural beauty, but it also brings much-needed commodities to maintain the health and well-being of the residents of the County. Medical supplies, scientific equipment, food products, dry goods, and many other items are brought into the County by air carriage from the mainland.

From the foregoing, it can readily be perceived that what the County of Hawaii needs most today is increased direct Hilo-mainland flights. If the five carriers which are the subject of this proceeding do not wish to inaugurate or reestablish service at Hilo now, then their present authority ought to be terminated and other carriers be given the Hilo, Hawaii air service authority, on condition that they institute service immediately.

Thank you very much.

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