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Annual Report of the President

Gill Robb Wilson

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ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT*

GILL ROBB WILSON†

· COMING EVENTS CAST SHADOWS

The development of aviation will dominate the history of the world for the next half century. As the roads of the Romans projected nations into being and fabricated many dialects into a few languages, so will the unbarred skyways affect the destiny of races. Steam speeded up surface travel, the internal combustion engine complemented it, electricity energized it. But the swiftest vehicle of the land stopped impotent at the shore of the sea and the water borne craft was confined to its own element. Therefore a half dozen strategic points on the face of the earth made princes or paupers of all civilization.

Then in a single generation the mountains became milestones, the seas dried in their beds, the girth of the earth shrank to a man's estate and the sands of time ran slower. The isolation of far places is no more and languages are again but dialects. The aggregate of the good or the evil, the ignorance or the knowledge, the hate or the love of the universe is upon us. With the barriers down we shall see what we shall see, although through the overcast of old limitations we can just now but peer dimly along the runways of tomorrow. Doubtless our eagerness will trip us and mirages of too quick and sure attainment tempt us. Unforeseen significance of flight may thrill or sadden us, save or destroy us, but in whatever case, flight as a social and cultural force must grip our imaginations as we strive to make it a technical and economic reality. We are organized to play what part we may.

ORGANIZED AGAINST CONFUSION

The National Association of State Aviation Officials came naturally into being. A few scattered authorities realized that what grows fast is apt to grow wild. The federal government had no jurisdiction over many intra-state aviation activities. Lack of uniformity in development, promotion and regulation would be tragic.

* Address presented at the Seventh Annual Convention of the National Association of State Aviation Officials, December 1-3, 1937.

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Some influence had to be created to urge uniformity, to stimulate support of federal standards in intra-state flying. The whole could be no stronger than its weakest component. A State gone wild on over-regulation or unreasonable taxation would be as effective as a machine gun in bringing down aircraft. A State totally indifferent to aeronautical development would be in like category.

The NASAO was designed as a gyroscopic force to maintain balance. It was inevitable that aviation would grow beyond the ability of a skeleton staff of federal inspectors to either regulate or promote. It was also inevitable that equations of the subject would come before state legislatures. Wise and preferable it is to have experience and sympathy and understanding constituted in state government, rather than to depend on professional lobbies in temporary political regimes. That from the viewpoint of aviation. Good government too is also from the standpoint of the state to have a responsible official guarding the public safety and bringing to the state its fair share of aeronautical activity. So the NASAO crystalized swiftly into a constructive force because it originated from a statesmanlike conception.

THE NASAO CHALLENGES ITS MEMBERSHIP

While this organization seeks to exercise no authority over member officials it reiterates the challenge to each state that all of aviation is for all of the people. Every state director and commissioner through contact with his national body its kept aware of his obligation to each other state and to the nation. This body is instilled with the conviction that the frontiers of transportation belong to aviation, that the burden of defense rests on aviation, that the conquest of isolation is the result of aviation. We point out that the cost of an adequate national airway and airport system is infinitesimal in relation to its value or in comparison to the facilities of surface transportation. We believe that refinements in design, concentration in fuels, fabrication of new materials, presage cheaper and safer air traffic. With such a philosophy the state official does not become self centered or politically a hack.

THE NASAO ON THE FIRING LINE

The NASAO is proud of the fact that with several exceptions there are no anti-aircraft batteries in state capitols. These exceptions have been forced by lack of a national airport program rather than by any viciousness toward aviation. But our work

has not always been easy or simple. We have had to resist job grabbing, tax grasping efforts, more than once. At times we have battled lobbies. More often we faced indifference, misrepresentation, misunderstanding. The old fashioned idea that Santa Claus lives at the north pole has not always been easy to sustain. We glory in economically conducted state aviation departments which the public is glad to support from a general tax fund for value received in safety and progress. By such a general policy we maintain free and untrammelled channels for development of a numerically impotent industry. We have battled tax on aviation fuels at the ratio of tax designed for surface power plants. We have fought the taxing of aviation to support unrelated projects. We have created in many states the uniform law for aeronautics. The atmosphere is clearing now and the ceiling going up. Aviation executives have come to realize that the people of the United States live in the forty-eight states and not in Washington. They see at long last that wherever the power to regulate may rest, the power to tax is where they land or leave. Understanding and cooperation there is more essential than in any Federal regulatory bureau. If half the effort had been expended to help the states to wise and statesmanlike treatment of aviation, that has been expended in Washington, a sounder fundamental conception would be indicated.

WE PAY FOR INDEPENDENCE

In order that the NASAO may have absolute independence of voice, it collects no dues, accepts no contributions and makes no alliances. The annually elected officers must be prepared for personal sacrifice in time, energy, and money. Experience in leadership is guaranteed by requiring the President to come through three prior successive Vice-Presidencies. The Secretaryship is kept permanent as far as possible. Our official publication is the JOURNAL OF AIR LAW. Seven regional Vice-Presidents are responsible for correlation of activity in their respective areas. The annual and regional meetings welcome every constructive voice from every element of aviation. We move the annual meeting to various sections of the country in ratio to good reason.

WE NEED STRATEGY IN CIVIL DEVELOPMENT

To the NASAO the strategy of aviation development is highly important. A force for the welding of domestic commerce and national solidarity, if properly planned, it may have the opposite

effect through lack of planning. For example, the NASAO has deeply interested itself in the northwest and Alaska. Traditionally the trade of Alaska and much of northwestern Canada has debouched into the cities of Washington, Oregon, California, Montana, and to lesser degree the sister States of that region. If trans-Canadian airways, through international agreement, tapped that Alaskan source and drew the wealth east to Chicago, New York, and European markets, by-passing the cities of the northwest, a great injury would be done. Likewise, traffic from Europe to the Orient which by-passed the United States across Canada, and had permission to re-service at Hawaii, would deprive our coastal States of their inherent natural advantages. Here in the southeastern regions the same problem arises. Air traffic should not be allowed to by-pass the Southern States, having originated in great northern metropolitan centers and destined for Central and South America.

The very ability to cover long distances non-stop has a tendency to over-emphasize the metropolitan centers and throw out of gear our domestic relationships. Beyond the shadow of a doubt the navies of the future will develop winged cruisers, catapulted for indefinite range and fueled in flight. Without a question the airship will supplement with its peculiar advantages, the ocean lanes of the next decades. Without question, great cargo ships will be catapulted across continent from ocean to ocean, and landing on water make unnecessary such extensive airport areas as their weight and speed would indicate. Our inland centers will be over-passed with the exception of the Great Lakes metropolis, Chicago. We have already seen the size of airplanes outmode airports and regulate important inland cities to milk train status. Already this nation is aeronautically too much like a melon with a beautiful rind but an unripened interior.

Aviation must give attention to the service of our people. For the type of craft essential for domestic use and capable of economic adaptation on our airway systems, we must find construction materials to replace expensive and heavy metals. Too much horsepower is now necessary, too great and complicated landing facilities and areas demanded. The technicians must create an economically efficient airplane capable of employment in frequent schedules, limited to sound insurable pay load. Our domestic air transport systems are goaded with the prod of size, as are our cities. Size has its place in progress but in addition to hearing much about bigger, heavier, faster aircraft, I for one, would like to hear some-

thing about lighter, cheaper, simpler, more adaptable aircraft. This is without any spirit of criticism, for our aircraft and engine manufacturers have so far done a magnificent job. In addition to economic refinements for commerce must come refinements for military aircraft. Too great a proportion of national defense budget has to go for too few aircraft built of present materials and equipped with present power plants. Our Air Corps leadership can be trusted to keep ahead of trends and we want them to feel they have the full sympathy and backing of the NASAO, most of whose members were cradled in the Army or Navy.

THE PORTRAIT OF A STATE AVIATION OFFICIAL

Because the data is so often sought I shall incorporate in this paper a general outline of the duties of the average State Director. Normally the law lays upon him responsibility for safety and promotion. He has few regulatory duties because the present stability of aviation is such that juvenile or malicious flying practices are frowned upon by the modern pilot. A fixed base operator cannot make money with tenants of doubtful reliability. Economic necessity has removed the monkey glands of aviation. Now and then a director resorts to discipline, but very seldom. Practically the regulation is accomplished by the licensing of commercial airports and of commercial operators. The fixed base operator is protected from unfair transient competition. Students are taught responsibility as well as technique. The airport manager is liable for the conduct of activity about his field. The State Department backs him up and allows him to use his judgment. It assists him in getting fair taxation, creates for him a mechanics' lien law so that he can collect his bills, secures favorable workmen's compensation rates, protects his field against erection of obstacles limiting the available landing area, creates public confidence in his operations and seeks his advice in all matters pertaining to his interests. The intelligent director makes the widest possible contacts with every element of aviation, seeking to bring into his State factories where mechanics can find employment, schools where the young people can get aircraft and engine training, terminal facilities where servicing and fuel distribution furnish employment. He seeks to create vocational aviation training in the public schools, conducts vocational guidance clinics, speaks before civic clubs and municipal governments, keeps his governor and other officials abreast of aeronautical developments, promotes the

use of aircraft in state affairs. He educates Granges to the use of crop-spraying, highway departments and assessors to the utility of aerial photography. He ferrets out unethical stock promotion rackets and furnishes the press accurate facts on accidents or any other subject they wish to explore. He supervises air meets and exhibitions, encourages model contests and maintains correspondence and contact with friends of aviation who may or may not be fliers. He maintains pilot and aircraft files, advises with any ship owner on problems which may arise, makes inspections of aircraft when he thinks a critical situation justifies. In particular he is the friend and counsellor of the private pilot, whose lot is not always a happy one, especially if he is in a state where heavy air transport traffic is a problem or where great distances limit the contacts. The placing of air markers, lighting of obstacles, inspection of airports, investigation of complaints, development of new fields, compiling of reports, collection of a legal and technical library, maintaining of contact with the Bureau of Air Commerce, and other organizations is routine duty. He himself must keep posted on ships, motors, radios, instruments, materials, law, design and trends. He must get out to the aeronautical conferences and conventions if he wants leadership for his State. In other words, he is not alone a director but a promoter, an educator and a strategist.

THE FORM OF A STATE AVIATION DEPARTMENT

The form of a State aviation department is not important to the NASAO, but it is to the State. In some States an executive designee is sufficient. In others an aviation bureau may be set up under an already existing department. A State highway department alignment or motor vehicle department may be utilized. The highway department has the experience of construction and state wide coverage. Most State police departments have teletype service which is valuable to aviation. But there is apt to be resentment in a State police alliance because that gives the idea that regulation is the key to the job instead of promotion and assistance. In a state where there is great aviation activity a separate department may be advisable. Some states have aeronautical development under the adjutant general. Non-salaried advisory commissions are sometimes appointed. At times such a commission may be formed of ex-officio heads of highway, motor vehicle, commerce and navigation, state police departments, etc. The important thing is the

fundamental conception of the job to be done. How best to do it depends on the circumstances in each State.

THE NEED FOR A NATIONAL POLICY

Quite naturally the progress of aviation has been attended with some confusion. Like a nestling first trying his wings, it has fluttered and flapped and landed upside down. The young bird has attracted a few real cats which would not be above eating it. Sometimes it has also been terrified by a friendly hand which would lift it to a sound limb. However, as the feathers sprout the enemies look less important and the hands of the friends are more easily recognizable. We can turn to our own problems.

Several governmental agencies have made imperishable contributions to progress. The Post Office Department fostered flight through struggling years. The Department of Agriculture has gone far afield to probe and explore meteorological conditions. The Department of Commerce has built traditions of service none will forget. The Coast and Geodetic Survey, the Army and Navy and Coast Guard, the Federal Radio Commission, the Interstate Commerce Commission, the National Congress, all have made great contributions. However, aviation owes no one so much as it owes a duty to the country. Diplomacy may be bought but loyalty has to be given. And the hardest battles are the battles of judgment in time of peace. Aviation leadership is now engaged in such a conflict.

The public welfare is vulnerable through lack of a national aviation policy. The report of the President's Aviation Commission gathers dust in the files. Budgets are inadequate to guarantee the public safety. Unhealthy conditions force our air transport systems to such fierce competition that the savor is gone from the game. Where aviation should be sounding the key note to a fresh prosperity it lolls in the doldrums of uncertainty and fear. Federal agencies are a house divided against itself in a struggle for prestige of control of aviation. Aircraft develop without the least relationship to airports. Aids to navigation are totally inadequate, especially in sparsely settled sections of the land where they are most needed. Great metropolitan areas develop their facilities without strategic rhyme or reason. Unsatisfactory airports are maintained in existence by other than sound aeronautical judgment. Procurement routine and budget red tape run far behind the immediate and imperative necessities of present traffic. Governmental

personnel are too few to do the work they are represented as doing. No policy for airport construction has ever been inaugurated. Unnecessary regulation for private pilots discourages the entire group. Political pressure is forced upon the Weather Bureau, while half-paid, unqualified, part-time star gazers hope they guessed right on visibility.

None of these vulnerable conditions is the result of the failure or mismanagement or viciousness of any individual. They are perfectly normal to a situation where there are many bosses building a house without a blue print, and speaking different languages. I have great sympathy for public officials under political pressure, from the highest to the lowest, for they are helpless victims of an indefinite tide of human nature unharnessed to discipline. No individual can stem it. No personal castigations have any place in this picture.

THE NASAO WANTS A FEDERAL AVIATION COMMISSION

None of the confusion existing will be remedied until a national policy is enunciated. If aviation is self-evidently changing the facial makeup of the world, certainly it merits the attention of our highest authorities. Several years since, aviation was requested to tell its story and present its recommendations. It did so. The NASAO collaborated in that work. We have no reason to change our opinion and would but surrender to expediency if we did so. We still think a National Aviation Commission should be created immediately. Aviation needs a boss. He might not be too good a boss but at least responsibility could be hung around his neck.

AIRPORTS

I would recommend to the Government the creation of a Bureau of Federal Airports. Had it not been for W.P.A. Airport Work, air traffic in the United States would have been brought to a practical stop by the advent of the big ships. Federal participation in the construction, improvement and maintenance of airports is imperative, in the first place for strategic reasons and in the next place for economic reasons. That Bureau or section should have an adequate budget available to supplement funds provided by local communities, very much as the Bureau of Federal Roads supplements the highway construction in the states. This cooperation might take the form of Federal-State, Federal-Municipal or

even Federal-Industrial development. The allocation of funds would of course follow a carefully planned national network.

AIR TRANSPORT

I recommend granting to the air transport companies route certificates assuring them of permanency so long as they provide safe, satisfactory operations. Their subsidy should be direct and should place a premium on safety, frequency and type of service, capital investment, national defense strategy, and should allow for differentials in terrain, climate and density of population along route. The Post Office Department should have its own contracts with airlines but should not be the subsidizing agency of aeronautical expansion.

BUDGET FOR THE WEATHER BUREAU

The budget of the Weather Bureau should be increased in its aerological section so that more qualified personnel could be employed and so that immediate information could be available for everyone. The entire country has become weather conscious. As complete forecasts should be available in the most sparsely settled country as in the most thickly settled.

DO SOMETHING CONSTRUCTIVE FOR THE PRIVATE PILOT

Private flying merits more attention. As we know that airlines fly but thirty-two per cent of the total, we might even guess that the remaining sixty-eight per cent is important. Why not set up representation in the Bureau of Air Commerce to foster the interests of the private flier and his student brother. I would have instrument instruction made available through Link Trainers in centers where inspectors could preside over such training. I would have inspectors organize group training in airway control, airport traffic control, use of navigational and radio facilities. I would let a private pilot forward his physical examination and flying time sheet once a year to the Department upon notice that they were due. The private flying of the country could be welded into a great and constructive force if it had some encouragement and constructive supervision. All it now gets is regulation. Someday it will organize and knock the ears off somebody. It needs only leadership. It has the temper.

GIVE THE BUREAU A REAL CHANCE TO DO A JOB

A Federal Aviation Commission would get the Bureau of Air Commerce some immediate money. It would develop a procurement program at least two years in advance. Facilities would be on hand for immediate installation as necessity arose. The budget would be flexible in proportion to the amount of critical situations which might have to be covered without routine red tape. There is no reason why government should not be as competent to meet a crisis as is business. Needless to say politics has no business in a Bureau dealing with human life.

THESE MEN NEED A BREAK

I would recommend some thinking about mechanics. They should be graded. Mechanical personnel should have some incentive. The top grade ones would do the ship inspecting that the Department of Commerce Inspectors now do. Numbers of them could make a living that way. Aircraft inspection by such men could be done about four times a year and inspection would then mean something.

AVIATION SCHOOL RATINGS

A plan should be developed by which aviation trade schools were given standing in proportion to their qualifications to furnish the student with a sound education. No question is more often asked a state director of aviation than, "Where can I send my boy to get proper flight or mechanical training for a career in aviation?" If authority to give such a rating is not now held by the Bureau of Air Commerce it should present the request to Congress for such authority. Nowhere is stabilization more necessary than in the realm of education. Thousands of young men have been led to invest in a half-baked educational program that prepared them to be nothing. The good schools have suffered from the lack of confidence generated by the incompetent ones.

REMOVAL OF AIRPORT OBSTRUCTIONS

I believe it is conservative to say that one-fifth of the total available landing area of the airports of America is negated by obstacles outside the airports themselves. Trees, smoke stacks, tanks, pole lines, high tension towers, buildings of all sorts and descriptions limit fields and endanger the public safety with toler-

ance. We need laws of eminent domain which will permit of removal of obstacles interfering with the safety of the traveling public. This is one of the big things we can do in the states and one of the places where we are sure to meet heavy lobbies against us. Naturally such laws would give fair value for the objects removed, such value being set by negotiation or by condemnation proceedings.

AIR MARKINGS

This business of air markings should be taken to the American League of Municipalities, the National Association of Mayors and to state legislatures. The desirability of having every town and city in America identifiable from the air is unquestioned. Legislatures can memorialize the towns of a state. The American League of Municipalities and the Mayors can do even more. Thousands of signs have been placed but the lack is still enormous. Such signs should be on public buildings where they can be maintained. They are not costly or hard to maintain. We simply lack a constructive, permanent plan.

AVIATION AND DISASTER

Following the Ohio and Mississippi floods of last year I wrote the National American Red Cross, requesting an interview on a plan to organize aviation for emergency disaster work of any nature. I indicated how such a set-up could be made, what had been accomplished at Louisville, and how much more could have been accomplished if organized knowledge had been available. To date the brass hats have not gotten down that far in their correspondence. Airlines and private aviation alike turned to and saved a critical situation without thought of reward. It is unthinkable that we should learn nothing from that experience, or do nothing about it.

A NEW WIND TUNNEL

I would give the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics money for a new wind tunnel in addition to current budget requirements. We must have research.

A JOINT COMMITTEE IN CONGRESS

I would request the establishment of a joint committee on aviation in the Congress.

MANY GOODS THINGS HAVE BEEN DONE

Among the accomplishments we can record are: reorganization in the Bureau of Air Commerce; the form chosen for the new regulations; the airway traffic control development; the airport traffic control improvement; the instructor's rating. In comparison to bygone days the improvement in budget requests is also noticeable.

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

During the last sixty days, your President accompanied a survey of airports on which the Works Progress Administration had been active. The following incorporated report to the Honorable Corrington Gill was rendered after that inspection:

From either the standpoint of original construction or improvement on already existing airports, the majority of those WPA projects which we visited and inspected represent a full decade of normal growth of aviation ground facilities. Both air commerce and national defense owe a debt of sincere gratitude to the Works Progress Administration.

It is my recommendation that lacking a Federal Airport Program:

The Works Progress Administration should select a Board of Strategy to outline a comprehensive airport system for the United States, designed to adequately serve the development of air transportation and national defense and proceed on this master plan with as many projects as the strategy of relief labor and local cooperation can justify.

The Works Progress Administration should establish a special appropriation available to supplement the sponsors' contribution where a community would evidently not be justified in the development of facilities which the national defense or the interstate commerce of the nation would require.

The Works Progress Administration in conjunction with the Civilian Conservation Corps or other available agency, should develop facilities necessary along routes over sections of the nation where unseasonable weather or critical altitudes prevail and where no community exists to sponsor such facilities.

The Works Progress Administration should employ a staff whose function it should be to present to the eligible communities the facts developed by the Board of Strategy showing the significance of aviation facilities to that particular community thereby giving to the local officials an opportunity to judge the desirability of sponsoring an airport project from a background of accurate knowledge and thorough understanding. Unfamiliarity with flight as a new element of social, economic and political significance leaves local officials at a disadvantage in estimating the desirability of an airport for their community.

The safety of air transportation and the efficient operation of our military establishment, awaits the development of aviation

ground facilities. Aviation gives the unemployed of America a snappy salute!

CONCLUSION

Of my activities during the year little need be said. Enough to say I have been glad to do what I could. Contacts have been maintained with all other organizations, bureaus, and with the industry. I have travelled about forty thousand miles, written thousands of letters, telegrams, etc. Practically every State in the Union now has or is contemplating state legislation. If it is constructive and uniform the NASAO is well repaid. I want to pay high tribute to my fellow members and to all who have helped to make the work lighter. In no other business that I know of could so much personal effort and sacrifice be asked and given. Perhaps it is because the minds of most of us run back twenty years, and come slowly up the long parade of personal tragedies which broke our hearts time after time but which created in us an unconscious resolution to fulfill the dreams of those who fell. In any case the comradeship of the men and women in this game is its one greatest personal reward, to each of us.