

**STATEMENT OF SENATOR JEAN CARNAHAN**

**Senate Committee on Commerce**

**Hearing on “Airline Passenger Service” February 13, 2001**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for convening today’s hearing on this important subject.

Given the nature of a Senator’s schedule and the travel that it requires, all of us have become experts on the subject, whether we wanted to or not.

I believe the issue of airline delays and passenger service is so impassioned because we live closely scheduled lives. We are trying to pack more into a day or week than would have been imaginable even ten years ago. Whether a person is heading for an important business meeting, or taking a late night flight to get home to his or her family -- time is a precious commodity, and information is a precious resource.

So when passengers are spending hours in the airport waiting for a delayed flight, or worse yet, the flight is cancelled without any notice, for no apparent reason, tempers run high. Frustrations mount.

Of course, all problems surrounding air travel are not the fault of the airlines. Some delays and cancellations are outside of the airlines' control. However, timely and accurate information provided by the airlines can go a long way to soothe the frayed nerves of a weary traveler. It is always frustrating to have your plans disrupted – but it is even more stressful not to be informed of what has occurred and to be ill-advised of your options for remedying the situation.

The Inspector General's report suggests that the airlines have made progress in a number of areas addressed by the voluntary rules outlined in the Airline Customer Service Commitment. However, much more has to be done to address air travelers' most significant complaints; chiefly those complaints concerning flight delays and delays where passengers are trapped on-board a grounded plane.

Ideally, Congress should not have to intervene to make sure that an industry treats its customers well. But the airlines must know that if the situation does not improve quickly, eventually this Committee will have no choice but to take action. I am eager to hear the recommendations of the

Department of Transportation Inspector General and learn how the airline industry intends to address the serious concerns raised in his report.