

STATEMENT OF SENATOR CLELAND--HEARING ON AVIATION DELAY  
PREVENTION ACT  
March 29, 2001

Madame Chairman, six months ago this Committee held a hearing on flight delays and, as you well know, the statistics were grim. In 1999, one in five flights arrived late, with each delay averaging about 50 minutes. Last year, the news was even worse--with flight delays averaging 55 minutes. When cancellations are added in, nearly one in four flights either arrived late or were canceled. All told, nearly 1.5 million flights were delayed or canceled last year. With one billion passengers projected by 2009, clearly, as the Mineta report warned, our air space is approaching gridlock.

With the long, hot travel season fast approaching, the American public is crying out for relief--and they want that relief NOW. So, Madame Chairman, I am very pleased that the Committee is holding a hearing on legislation that addresses this burning issue. As you know, the world's busiest airport is in my home state. With 78 million passengers last year, Hartsfield is also the country's most delay-impacted airport. And delays at Hartsfield impact airports and passengers throughout the system. In his testimony before this Committee last year, Ken Mead talked about the effect of bad weather in Atlanta on April 3<sup>rd</sup> of last year. Because of the weather, a significant number of flights in and out of Atlanta were affected. And the delays at Hartsfield caused a ripple effect throughout the system. Mr. Mead testified that on that day in April the FAA reported a total of 1,317 delays system-wide. Almost a third of those delays--405 to be exact--were due to weather conditions at Atlanta.

Madame Chairman, I think your legislation offers some interesting approaches, including the provisions calling for an expedited environmental review process. Hartsfield desperately needs a fifth runway. Without it--and with 100 million passengers projected in 2005--it's estimated that each flight at Hartsfield will average 14 minutes of delay. With construction of the fifth runway, flight delays at Hartsfield will be cut dramatically--to just five minutes on average. This is a savings of nine minutes per flight, and it will benefit passengers not just in Georgia and the southeast, but passengers across the nation. So I appreciate today's hearing and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.