

COALITION AGAINST THE SST

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Honorary Chairman

STATEMENT OF STEWART L. UDALL

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Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to appear today on behalf of the Coalition Against the SST, to sum up their arguments against this research and development effort and to urge that the SST program be terminated forthwith.

The Coalition Against the SST approaches this issue with far more than a concern about noise levels (as important as that neglected subject is in a society where the noise level is doubling every eight years). We speak on behalf of the real needs of the people of our country. We want to redirect the powerful technology of the country so that it will improve the living standards, the environmental health and the economic wellbeing of all the American people.

I have been an opponent of the SST nearly six years. In 1966, as Secretary of the Interior, I appointed a distinguished team of scientists who made the first searching analysis of this project. The project was a dubious -- and extravagant -- exercise then. It is a potential economic and environmental disaster today.

By reputation, the Appropriations Committees of the Congress are the tough-minded, hard-headed groups that protect the taxpayers against the misguided use of public funds. I will waste no time this morning on side issues. There are, in my view, three hard-headed, very pragmatic reasons why this program should be sidetracked.

The first argument we advance against the SST is that it is an airborne Edsel. Today the commercial airline industry of this country is sick -- we face not one, but several potential "flying Penn Centrals." I have talked with high-placed airline officials in recent weeks. Most of them will not appear here (and the few who do will come out of duty, having foolishly pledged their support to the pro-SST coalition several years ago). These officials are privately appalled at the prospect of having to sign solid contracts for these aircraft. They are already in deep financial trouble trying to meet their obligations for the current generation of jet aircraft. A few weeks ago Charles A. Lindbergh forthrightly spoke their fears when he expressed the judgment that

My impression is that the SST is within the state of the art technically but not economically or environmentally. Seat-mile costs are too high, and the pollution of the upper atmosphere too dangerous on the basis of present knowledge. I believe it would be a mistake to become committed to a multi-billion dollar SST program without reasonable certainty that SSTs will be practical economically and acceptable environmentally.

Gentlemen, Lockheed is on the ropes -- and Rolls Royce is in bankruptcy. You should want to save Boeing from a similar peril. With

all candor, I am opposed to this project because I want to save the jobs of U.S. working men and women. It is far better -- far more prudent and hard-headed -- to seek alternative forms of work for these people than to charge ahead throwing good money after bad and ending up with tens of thousands of Americans abruptly out of work the way Rolls Royce employees are right this day.

This, I believe, is the most compelling issue over the SST at this time -- and not the umpteen ghost jobs that supposedly would be created by the success of this project. The only outside chance for this fleet to fly and make economic sense is for it to fly supersonically overland across the United States.

Our second argument is that the environmental risks are too severe and there are too many unresearched, unknown factors for this project to proceed. Eminent scientists will present testimony on this topic, so I will not consume the time of the Committee except to say that I concur in their judgments and reservations.

The third argument we advance is the issue of national priorities. Putting economics aside, the SST, even if it were the brilliant success its backers suggest, is a technology that will provide dubious benefit for only a small fraction of our citizens. These people, VIP's (such as ourselves), the international jet set, and the super-affluent elite constitute, at most, one-half of one percent of our citizens. How important, we ask, is a faster plane to serve a tiny elite when our cities are ~~at the edge of~~ ^{SICK} ~~at the edge of~~ and the overall environment is deteriorating before our eyes?

My spirit is devoid of any partisanship. The tragedy of the SST (a serious misjudgment of national needs by three Administrations) is that the \$800 millions could have been spent on research and development that would have produced vital economic, social and environmental gains for everyone.

One striking example will make the point. If we had spent these taxpayer dollars on perfecting and subsidizing the air-cushion train, today we would be building a swift, ^{largely} pollution-free form of transportation that would be a convenience and benefit to every American. It would serve all of the densely populated urban corridors, connect the major cities of this country -- and would be providing, in 1971, well over 100,000 thousand industrial and construction jobs for U.S. workmen. The folly of the SST is starkly revealed when we consider what might have been had we used American ingenuity and resources in the right way.

We are in the grips of what can only be called a kind of technological hubris. This is the lesson of Lockheed, of the C5-A fiasco, of the Rolls Royce bankruptcy. In pursuit of the idea that a bigger or faster machine is always better -- and a sure fire success in the marketplace -- we have arrogantly used our skills to create new problems for man, not to enhance life. There is still time to redirect our energies and change our priorities. This is the challenge confronting this Committee.

With reluctance, I must mention one other subject and then I

am finished. As a citizen I am appalled at the situation that has developed with the formation of the "volunteers" committee for the SST -- a group that announced a few weeks ago it would spend \$350,000 to win approval of this project. Who is putting up this money? Who organized this committee? Who is paying the salaries of its lobby team? These are questions this Committee should ask. If you do, I believe you will find that the very corporations who have profited from the SST contracts are (directly or indirectly) using the same taxpayers' money voted earlier by this Committee to persuade you to squander more of our money for this solid-gold flying Cadillac for a travel elite.

We, the opponents, find ourselves in a David-versus-Goliath fight here today. The conservation-environment forces are, as always, financed by pennies. Our scientific witnesses are true volunteers who are unpaid advocates of what they view as the national interest. I believe the people of this country -- the growing group who are informed on this issue -- are overwhelmingly against further down-the-rathole spending for the SST. But are they to be overwhelmed by corporations who are spending taxpayers' money to high-pressure Congress?

This is the moral issue in this room today. It cannot be avoided -- and it is not "hysterical sloganeering." Thank you.