

VILLAGE VIEW

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Few Americans remain in doubt about what's causing inflation; economists from Milton Friedman to Alan Reynolds of the First National Bank of Chicago, and even some of the administration's own economic advisors, pinpoint the principal reason precisely. The biggest culprit is the federal debt which in only three years has grown by \$26 billion or 30 per cent. Were it not for the increase in federal debt, we might be enjoying an inflation rate of a comfortable three per cent a year.

To take a closer look at ways federal agencies can cause inflation, and also to relate their actions to effects felt on the home front, far from the halls and portals of Washington, consider the latest Federal Aviation Administration security regulations as they impact commuter airlines.

One such is Provincetown-Boston Airline, Inc.; if forced to comply with new FAA regulations, PBA must install and maintain security measures at an annual cost of \$657,606. In addition, expenses for fences, lights, training manuals, and training security personnel and flight crews would be incurred.

Certainly no one flying between Boston and Provincetown, or any other points served by PBA or other commuter airlines, wants to be aboard a plane that's hijacked. On the other hand, what are the chances a highjacking might occur, and is the threat real enough to warrant such expense? As in every other business, increased operating costs must be passed along to the consumer; with rapidly rising fuel prices, air fares are already increasing. Do consumers truly need the protection that the FAA security regulations require? Or is this but another example of a federal agency justifying its existence by imposing regulations unnecessarily?

To obtain rational answers, it's valuable to examine the history of aircraft hijacking which began nearly twenty years ago in 1961.

Between the first hijacking in 1961 and 1967, there were eleven incidents of air piracy involving U.S. civil planes in North America. These were random takeovers with no recognizable pattern. The number was sufficiently insignificant that no federal action was taken.

In the following four years, however, hijackings increased dramatically; 145 attempts were made to hijack jet aircraft. Federal security measures were put into effect at all international commercial airlines terminals. Passengers were required to submit to electronic observation before boarding. Carry-on luggage was similarly screened. Ladies' handbags and men's brief cases, moving on conveyor belts, underwent electronic tests for metal which might be weapons. A bunch of keys in a topcoat pocket was sufficient to set off the alarm and bring armed guards to the ready.

As a result, between 1973 and 1979, the incidence of air piracy was significantly reduced. A total of only 42 attempts was reported.

The Federal Aviation Administration now cites a need for security measures for commuter airlines. In the entire nineteen years between 1961 and 1979 there have been only 43 non-jet hijackings and since 1972 there has not been a single commuter airline hijacking in the continental United States. It would appear, therefore, no significant implicit threat to commuter airlines passengers truly exists.

Commuter airlines operate small non-jet planes. Small non-jets, the record indicates, are unattractive targets for hijackers. General aviation airlines operate somewhat larger planes and, since 1973, there have been 19 attempts to hijack non-jet general aviation and airline equipment. Two of these involved planes with more than 19 seats; three were made on planes seating between nine and nineteen passengers; fourteen of the nineteen non-jet hijacking attempts were made on

planes seating less than nine people. In the same period, twenty-three jets were pirated.

In scheduled airline operation, one hijacking involved an Air New England Twin Otter when a hijacker scaled the Hyannis Airport security fence in 1975 and took over a Twin Otter being taxied for maintenance purposes, not for revenue passenger operation. Full airline security would not have prevented the piracy in this case. Two other incidents, one in 1973 at Washington, D.C., and the other at Kingston, N.C., have been recorded.

Since 1972, when three scheduled commuter aircraft were pirated (one, a Grumman Goose at Miami, one, a Cessna 206 at Key West, and one, a DHC-Heron at Ponce, Puerto Rico), there have been no hijackings of commuter air carriers.

In summary, of the total of eleven hijackings of U.S. Civil airplanes occurring between 1961 and 1967, none involved commuter carriers; of the total of 145 incidents recorded between 1968 and 1972, only five involved commuter carriers; and since 1972 there have been forty-two such incidents, but none involving commuter aircraft.

Furthermore, in none of the five piracies occurring between 1968 and 1972 were any passenger injuries suffered; inconvenience, perhaps, but no one was hurt.

At the possible risk of challenging some nitwit to shatter the eight-year record, it seems evident the requirement for installing costly security equipment at commuter airlines terminals, maintaining it at an annual expense of \$657,606 in the case of Provincetown-Boston Airlines, and training commuter air carrier personnel to operate the equipment, is unjustified.

It would seem the Federal Aviation Administration has misinterpreted its own statistics and is imposing on commuter carriers and, in turn, on the consumer increased costs that add insult to injury.

The multiple absurdities become more apparent the more deeply all aspects of commuter air travel are examined. In these days of energy shortages people are encouraged by government policy to use public transportation. Commuter aircraft flying between Provincetown and Boston, for example, carry passengers directly across Cape Cod Bay, eliminating many miles of highway driving and providing commuters a fast, inexpensive and convenient alternate to the private car. If the carrier is burdened with over half-a-million dollars of additional operating expenses a year, the economic advantages of commuting by plane will be lost.

No business can afford long to operate at a deficit; as its expenses rise, additional costs are passed through to consumers. In this instance, consumers will view commuting by plane an extravagance and will use commuter flights less often or not at all. No air carrier can afford to operate aircraft with empty seats. Service will be curtailed. Fewer flights will make commuting less convenient. The private car that now sits in its garage will return to the highway.

The facts in this article have been supplied by John C. Van Arsdale, president of Provincetown-Boston Airline, Inc., as compiled by the Commuter Airline Association of America, and are based on records of hijackings in the Federal Aviation Administration's own files.

Mr. Van Arsdale's comments include the statement, "There is little statistical evidence to support FAA's rationale for commuter airline security. The record shows commuter air piracy is virtually non-existent." He further believes there is no cost benefit and the lack of productivity in the FAA's security regulations, as they pertain to commuter airlines, is inflationary.

After studying the statistical analysis developed by the Commuter Airline Association of America, it is difficult not to agree with Mr. Van Arsdale's viewpoint. Now the question is, "How does the public communicate this conclusion to the Federal Aviation Administration?"