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NASA MEDIA BRIEFING

"Release of Aviation Safety Data"

SPEAKERS:

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[Moderated by J.D. Harrington, NASA Public Affairs]

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MODERATOR: This is J.D. Harrington. Mr. Griffin, are you on with us?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Yes, I am here, J.D.

MODERATOR: Thank you very much, Mike.

Hello. I am J.D. Harrington. I will be the moderator for today's media teleconference on the National Aviation Operational Monitoring Service, or NAOMS. The file should be available on the NASA.gov website now.

Joining us on the telecon is NASA Administrator Mike Griffin and Bryan O'Connor, Chief of the Office of Safety and Mission Assurance.

I will quickly go over a couple of rules if we can just before we proceed. We will have an opening statement from Bryan O'Connor, and then I will call for media questions in the order that we received the RSVPs after Friday's media advisory.

We have a lot of people on the line. If you would please, please mute your phone by pushing Star-6.

Because of the number of people on the line, we need to limit questions to one per reporter with no follow-up, and if we have time at the end, we will circle

back and start through the list once again.

Once again, please mute your phones.

Now here is Bryan O'Connor with our opening statement.

MR. O'CONNOR: Good afternoon.

On the 19th of November, Mike Griffin asked me to convene a small group of senior NASA officials to oversee a formal review of airline and general aviation pilot survey responses that we collected as part of the National Aviation Operations Monitoring Service project and to recommend to him a methodology for their release. The goal was to release as much survey response information as possible before the end of the calendar year, but only release information that does not contain confidential commercial information or information that could compromise the anonymity of individual pilots.

The panel members are persons independent of NASA's Aviation Safety Program, but who have working knowledge of aviation operations, safety, and law, as well as access to anyone we needed within the agency to do the job.

To prepare its recommendations, the panel talked

with NASA and Battelle NAOMS project team members, the leadership of NASA's Aviation Safety Program, and with NASA members of the FAA's Aviation Safety Reporting System. The panel also met by phone or in person with senior aviation safety leaders of the Flight Safety Foundation, the Air Travelers Association, the Airline Pilots and Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association.

The panel submitted to the administrator on November 30th recommendations for this release of information, including timing, format, and criteria. The contractor, Battelle Memorial Institute, has performed these redaction steps with verification by NASA personnel.

The actual responses contained in these surveys and the methodology used to acquire them were outside the scope of the panel's charter. They have not been peer-reviewed to date. Accordingly, no product of the NAOMS project, including the survey methodology, the survey responses themselves, or any analysis of the responses should be viewed or considered at this stage as having been validated.

The website contains the redacted responses collected from over 25,000 air carrier surveys conducted

from April 2001 through December 2004 and over 4,000 general aviation surveys collected in the years 2002 and '3. You will see on the website a technical report prepared for NASA by Battelle called the NAOMS Reference Report Methods and Development Road Map. Also included on the website is a copy of the memorandum from Mike Griffin that established the NAOMS Information Release Panel and a document called Summary of Redaction of NAOMS Survey Responses.

During the last week or so, our team came across a few technical difficulties, as you could expect from a release this size -- we are talking 16,000 pages of information that is on the website -- and we decided to hold back a limited set of survey responses, and I will tell you what those were.

There are 730 responses in the general aviation section that apply to rotary wing aircraft, and because they had some special questions unique to the rotary wing class, we did not have time to assess them and apply the proper redaction.

Also, last week, we found a little over 400 air carrier survey responses that had been misfiled in the GA

surveys, and by the time we discovered this, we did not have time to incorporate them into their appropriate air carrier sections. For both of these information sets, we plan to apply the appropriate redaction steps and then update the website, hopefully, in the next couple of weeks.

In summary, with minor exceptions I mentioned, we have completed our task of making as much information available to the public as possible by the end of the year with proper steps taken to protect pilot anonymity and confidential commercial information.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Bryan.

We will now start with the first question. If you would, remember to mute your phone, if you haven't already, with Star-6.

Going out to the Houston Chronicle, Mark Carreau?

QUESTIONER: Yes. Can you hear me?

MODERATOR: Yes.

QUESTIONER: Okay. I think this is for Dr. Griffin. I think in your testimony to Congress, you characterized this data as not as valid as you would prefer to have for a normal NASA report. I wonder if you might tell us if that is still your thought and what you think it

is missing that would be critical.

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Let's see. First of all, that is still my thought. One can't retroactively peer-review a set of scientific or engineering technical work. The fundamental concern that I had at the time of my testimony and still have is that this research work was not properly peer-reviewed at its inception, and the data that was extracted from the survey was not properly validated at its conclusion.

We have been asked by the Congress in report language this year to perform an assessment of the data, and we will do that. We will be doing that through the National Academy of Sciences to assure independence of the work, but I do remain concerned.

From the conclusions that arose out of the survey itself, it was reported, for example, that the survey unearthed approximately four times as many engine failures as the FAA believes that it has cognizance of. Engine failures, as I am sure you know, are a very high-profile item. This is an area where if someone comes in and says we are seeing four times as many engine failures as are being otherwise reported, it calls into question the

reporting mechanism rather than the underlying rate of engine failure which we believe we understand.

There are other inconsistencies. Those kinds of inconsistencies when we looked at the data gave us pause for thought and still do. However, my promise to the community was to release all of the raw data that we could release without compromising either commercial confidential information that had been voluntarily submitted or without compromising pilot anonymity, and we are doing that.

MODERATOR: Thanks, Mike.

Next, we will go to Susanna Ray, Bloomberg News.

[No response.]

MODERATOR: Susanna, are you on?

[No response.]

MODERATOR: All right. Matt Hosford, ABC News.

QUESTIONER: Sir, what value then do you place on this information that you have now put up on the web then?

What is the use of it to us as we are reading through this, and what is the use of it in trying to get a sense on aviation safety at this point?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, I don't know. That would be up for you to determine.

There is a tradition in scientific and engineering work which is that when new research is done, it is published or normally is published in the peer-reviewed literature, and the underlying data that has been taken in the course of doing the research is made available to the broader community for independent assessment.

Now, it is that second step that we are focusing on here today. NASA had earlier denied a FOIA request with what I thought used an inappropriate choice of language. We left the wrong impression, and I didn't want to see that happen. So I reversed that denial and said, nonetheless, we had legal obligations to ensure, again, that pilot confidentiality was protected and that voluntarily submitted commercial confidential information was protected. Those are legal obligations that are part of the FOIA process.

We came across some instances in looking at the raw data where information was contained in the raw data that could have compromised one of those two things. So we determined that an independent review of that data was necessary in order to prevent such compromise.

We promised an early review by the end of this year. I think you can see that we took that promise seriously. Bryan O'Connor and his team of people worked over the holidays. When all of you were taking a break, they were working to get this information out. This is our initial release. We will be studying the data in its fullness to determine whether other data, additional data can be released without compromising one of those two areas, but that is what this is about. This is about the public release of information gathered at taxpayer expense in support of a research project done some years ago at NASA. It is for the broader community to do with it as they wish.

MODERATOR: Thanks, Mike.

Gannett, John Yaukey. Are you on, John?

[No response.]

MODERATOR: All right. If you would, please mute your phones, Star-6. We now go to Lisa Tabb. Are you on?

[No response.]

MODERATOR: All right. The Asahi Shimbun, Toshi Katsuda.

[No response.]

MODERATOR: All right. We're looking good so far. Baltimore Examiner. How about you, Karl, are you on?

[No response.]

MODERATOR: All right. We will keep going down the list.

QUESTIONER: Hello? Hello?

MODERATOR: Hello?

QUESTIONER: This is Karl Hille with the Baltimore Examiner.

MODERATOR: All right. Go ahead. You can ask your question.

QUESTIONER: I wanted to know what the administrator thinks this tells people about the safety of their personal experience in the air.

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, let's see. As Peggy Gilligan said in a quote the other day in connection with the NAOMS data, they plan to integrate this work into their overall Aviation Safety Program, but the FAA has moved on.

They have over 150 different programs to provide survey data from pilots, mechanics, flight attendants, dispatchers that is part of a broader process in their

Aviation Safety Action Program to capture the same kind of input that NAOMS was intended to capture.

So NASA and the FAA work closely together in aviation safety, and honestly, it is my belief that the operational entity in charge of aviation safety, the FAA, has simply moved on from NAOMS.

So what the public I think should believe, if you are asking for my opinion on that, what the public should understand is that they have approximately the same risk of dying from a lightning strike as they do of dying from an air transport accident in the United States, which means to say that this is one of the safest forms of travel that human beings have ever invented, and that no one should think otherwise.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Michael.

We are still hearing quite a bit of noise on the background of the telecon. If you could, please mute your telephone, Star-6.

We now go to Allen Stahler.

[No response.]

MODERATOR: All right. Associated Press, Rita Beamish.

QUESTIONER: Administrator, we have just only now been able to look at this data; not really giving us a chance to ask you questions about it, but our technical people are looking at it, and it is posted in a PDF format.

While I am aware that it is available elsewhere in Excel and FAS format, which would be much less cumbersome to use and would provide an opportunity to compile and analyze the data. It just appears you made an effort to obstucate results. Why didn't you post it in something that would make it more user friendly for the public? It is very difficult to use, and we are not even sure how to go about it.

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, our standard format for data release is PDF format. I am sure you know that. I am sure you know that the reason why we use PDF format is that the data cannot then be altered by others without our knowledge and still claim that it is NASA data. So that is a concern that we have and must guard against.

Now, there are any number of optical character recognition programs on the market. I have one on my home computer that will allow you to convert PDF files into the format of your choice. I am sorry to have to ask you to

take that additional step, but it is important for people to understand that any data that comes out of NASA will be in PDF format, and that anyone claiming to have NASA data in Excel format or any other format has got bootleg data or other data that we, NASA, do not certify.

QUESTIONER: Mr. Administrator, just a quick follow-up.

MODERATOR: No follow-ups, Rita. I'm sorry. I have got to be stingy on this.

CNN, Kate Tobin?

QUESTIONER: It is Miles O'Brien. Kate Tobin stepped away from the phone.

Mr. Griffin, it sounds like you are not very proud of this study. It sounds like really a lot of taxpayers' money has been wasted here.

I know it didn't happen on your watch, but to what extent have you been able to determine how it happened, how such a flawed study was bought and paid for by the taxpayers, and what are you doing to ensure that it doesn't happen again?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, I can't allow you to put words in my mouth, Miles, saying that I am not very

proud of the study. It is really not - (Griffin is interrupted)

QUESTIONER: Well, you haven't said anything good about it from the get-go.

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, we consider that the study was not properly organized and not properly reviewed, and I have said that in testimony, and it makes the results very difficult to interpret and to use.

We have been asked by the Congress, requested by the Congress to assess the data, and we will do that. We will have it done independently, and then I think there is probably no higher standard of such scientific and technical independence in the United States than the National Academy of Sciences, and we are going to ask that body to assess this work.

That said, people can take whatever conclusions they want from that assessment and use it as they will.

I do consider this, as I have said, to be -- as I said in testimony, this is a red flag for us. We need to make sure that other small studies of this nature that might not normally come to the attention of upper management do, in fact, receive appropriate attention from

upper management.

When you say a lot of money was wasted, there was something a little bit over a million dollars a year that was put into this study. It is a very small amount by normal standards with which our work is done. I appreciate that it is a lot of money to a taxpayer. It is a lot of money to me, but it is a very small fraction of our overall work, and it in retrospect did not receive the attention that it should have received.

MODERATOR: Thanks, Mike.

Once again, we have got a typist in the background that is distracting the entire teleconference group. Please mute your phone, Star-6.

We now go to NBC News, Tom Costello.

QUESTIONER: Hi. It is Tom Costello in Washington. Hi, Dr. Griffin. Thanks for taking a moment on a busy holiday time for you.

Just to reiterate, you were unable to draw any conclusions at all from this study, and am I correct in hearing you say this is simply raw data, you did not interpret it or find anything to interpret? Would that be an accurate way to characterize this?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, Tom, what I would say is NASA never intended to interpret this data. From the first, this study was in writing, was advertised as having as its basic purpose, the development of methodologies for collecting aviation safety data.

It was always the purpose of this study to transition it to the larger aviation safety community. I would remind everyone again that NASA does not have in law, does not have a responsibility for operational aviation safety. We do conduct research. So this was one element of such research.

We intended the data to be transitioned, again, to the larger safety community. We, in fact, extended the funding. The originally planned funding for this research was to end in 2004. We extended it for two years to 2006 and, in fact, as you can see, have extended the work even into 2007 in order to properly fund transition of the data and review of it by others.

So we have gone at NASA -- we have gone the extra mile with this data, and we have gone well beyond our original intentions. The unfortunate aspect of all this is that we issued a FOIA denial with inappropriate language,

and I believe that I fixed that. We will release all of this raw data that we can release, but NASA never had plans to analyze this raw data.

I said in response to an earlier question that I think the FAA has had the appropriate response to this. When NASA was conducting these surveys to try to obtain what many folks would characterize as "hangar talk" among pilots and aviation professionals regarding the kinds of experiences that might be risk precursors, the FAA established an Aviation Safety Action Program, or ASAP, which captures safety input data from pilots and all other kinds of aviation professionals, and they do it within 24 hours of the incident, and they offer immunity from prosecution. Those are our key points. They have more than 150 of these programs throughout the aviation industry.

So my take on all of this, Tom, is that the current practice is well beyond what was sought in the NAOMS project which, in fact, is why we brought it to an end.

MODERATOR: Thanks, Mike.

Once again, please mute your phones. We are

hearing background conversations.

We will go now to the L.A. Times and Jennifer Oldham. Jennifer, are you on?

QUESTIONER: Yes.

MODERATOR: All right. Go ahead.

QUESTIONER: Mr. Griffin, can you tell us -- you were talking about data that was redacted for legal reasons, and I understand that, but do you have any way of determining how much data other than the pilots' names was taken out? Can we tell at all what is missing aside from the other subsets you mentioned as well?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: With regard to how the data redaction was done on this initial release, I am going to let Bryan O'Connor answer that, and I would remind you that Bryan and his team spent this entire holiday period working on all of this in order to meet our deadline at the end of this year. So I am going to let Bryan tell you what his team did to answer your question.

MR. O'CONNOR: Jennifer, one of the things we will be posting on the website or is posted on the website with the released information is a document that is called NAOMS Survey Response Redaction Summary, and it does the

major -- it puts in tables the major redaction steps that we took.

It starts off by talking about some of the generalities, like, for example, reordering things. We had one strategic approach that we called "generalization," a dis-aggregation, where you provide the information, but you dis-aggregate it, separate it from its parent survey. These are the type of tactics that we use to try to get away from the fact that we have an unusually large amount of information on each survey to take a look at and make sure that you don't have the ability for someone to take that information, find its uniqueness, compare it to something outside, and narrow it down to a pilot, and that is why we had to come up with a variety of techniques.

And they are spelled out there. The purpose of each one is there. The effect on information loss is there, and in some cases, where you lose some information, we tried to generalize so the information is there, but it is less specific than maybe it was when it came out in the raw form.

MODERATOR: All right. Thanks, Bryan.

We will now go to Reuters and Julie Vorman.

Julie, are you on?

[No response.]

MODERATOR: All right. Let's go to the CBS Evening News and Carter Yang.

QUESTIONER: Hi, Dr. Griffin. You have been asked this question before, and you have answered it before, but if I may one more time.

Given what you have said about the survey, does it cast any doubt on the safety of the aviation system in your mind or the statistics gathered on these same types of incidents by the FAA?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: No, it doesn't, not in my mind.

MODERATOR: All right. Now The Washington Post, Del Wilber.

[No response.]

MODERATOR: All right. The New York Times, Matt Wald.

[No response.]

MODERATOR: USA Today, Alan Levin.

QUESTIONER: Hi.

QUESTIONER: Can you hear me?

QUESTIONER: Yes. Hi. Thank you very much.

QUESTIONER: Hello?

QUESTIONER: Can you hear me?

QUESTIONER: Alan?

QUESTIONER: Yes.

QUESTIONER: No. It's Matt Wald. I'm sorry.

Can I get in a question here?

MODERATOR: All right. Go ahead, Matt.

Sorry. We will get right to you, Alan.

QUESTIONER: Thank you.

QUESTIONER: I'm sorry. I seem to have been muted twice.

Dr. Griffin, Jon Krosnick was a consultant on this project, and he testified next to you in, I guess, the end of October. He has told the committee that you cast out on the value of this study by misquoting the study. He gives two examples in later information provided to the committee.

You said that the NAOMS indicated diversions to alternate airports occurred at implausibly high rates, but he says you did that by paying inadequate attention to the question that NAOMS actually asked. You said that they

couldn't possibly have diverted at the rates cited when, in fact, the question didn't say diversions. It said "expedited landings were diversions."

He also says that you made an inappropriate comparison between NAOMS and other safety-related surveys by saying that the people who did the NAOMS survey were not trained in aviation when, in fact, the difficulty here is the managers of all kinds of surveys are trained in aviation -- or aviation experts, but this particular survey was, in fact, a survey in which it is inappropriate for the question-taker to do anything more than ask a standard question. You are not supposed to engage in extended conversation when asking the question.

I wonder what is your level of familiarity with NAOMS, and is there any validity to his rebuttal?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, I don't have my testimony in front of me. I don't have his response in front of me, and so I am not going to -- I'm sorry. I am not going to be able to comment on your question today.

QUESTIONER: Okay.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Mike.

Alan, USA Today.

QUESTIONER: Hi. Thank you.

The aviation safety experts that I have spoken with say that even though they are aware that there might be methodological problems with this, that there is great value to the unusual way that this was conducted; in other words, going out and doing extensive interviews with people. Whereas, these other programs you mentioned, ASAP and whatnot, require the pilots, et cetera, to take the first step and go out and report, self-report, and even with anonymity, you know, there is going to be a self-selection process there.

I mean, I gather from everything you have said here that you don't see any value to this at all, and given the fact that you've, you know, terminated the funding and all that, is there no value? If there is, what value is there here?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, again, we didn't terminate the funding. We actually extended the funding longer than originally planned, and, you know, if I need to say that another couple of times for the record, I guess I will.

This was a project which was begun in '98 and

which was intended to have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and we seem to be unable to end it, which is a bit frustrating because we don't have the money to continue it.

Now, what was --

QUESTIONER: What was the value of this, if any?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, again, the value of this would need to be determined by the larger user community, the aviation safety community, which I would remind you again does not reside within NASA.

I think we have to allow the FAA, the Airline Pilots Association, numerous other groups with an operational interest in aviation safety to determine what its value is.

All that we at NASA have said is that this survey methodology was not peer-reviewed prior to its implementation, and the data which emerged from it was not validated at its conclusion.

The previous examples that I cited about diverted or expedited landings or engine failures about which there was a concern, I was citing the results of presentations made by the group themselves. So I don't know what more to say about it than that.

It is up to others, again, to determine whether or not they believe this research has value.

MODERATOR: Thanks, Mike.

We go now to the Pilot Safety News and Max Prescott.

QUESTIONER: I will pass at this time. Thanks.

MODERATOR: All right. James Swickard.

[No response.]

MODERATOR: James Swickard, Business and Commercial Aviation Magazine?

[No response.]

MODERATOR: All right. NPR, Richard Harris.

QUESTIONER: Hi. Can you hear me?

MODERATOR: Yes.

QUESTIONER: You mentioned at the top, Dr. Griffin, that you waited about three weeks after the congressional testimony to get Bryan O'Connor and others actually on this task, and now you have released it on probably the slowest possible imaginable news day of the year. I wonder if you would like to comment about the timing of this release of data.

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, we didn't wait

three weeks, as your question implies. I really -- I will have to say for the record, I dislike the tone of your question. We didn't wait three weeks. We needed some time to think about how we were going to handle the issue. I'm sorry that we were not able to think as quickly as you would like us to have thought.

The team, as Bryan said, on a couple of occasions ran into some unexpected difficulties in redacting the data, and they needed all of the time that they could have.

We didn't deliberately choose to release on the slowest news day of the year. We felt that if we waited into the new year to release that people exactly like you, would claim that we had broken our promise to release by the end of the year. So we have done the best we could.

QUESTIONER: Thank you.

QUESTIONER: Jim Swickard here.

MODERATOR: Going down to the Orlando Sentinel, Bobby Block.

QUESTIONER: Nothing at this time. Thanks.

MODERATOR: All right. Boston Globe, Brian Bender.

QUESTIONER: Yes. Thanks.

Just a question maybe to both of you. Just taking a very cursory look at what you guys have released today, clearly, it is a lot of numbers, a lot of data. Just from your professional point of view, how long do you think it would take the National Academy of Sciences or others to actually glean anything from this information? When can the public or can it ever expect this 25,000-plus surveys will tell them something about whether air travel is safe, safer than thought, et cetera, and is that possible?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: I will let Bryan go ahead, and if I have anything to add, I will do so when Bryan is done.

MR. O'CONNOR: It is hard for me to speculate on how long it might take.

The way you asked the question, I need to make sure that you realize that this assessment we are talking about by the National Academies is simply an assessment of the validity, a peer review type of a thing, if you will, of the methodology, some characterization of the uncertainties and that sort of thing. It is a totally different thing, and we don't have anything planned to do

the next step, which would be to analyze the data and put out a trend analysis or some other normal products of something like this. That is not in the cards.

Frankly, I personally don't know how long either one of those two tasks would take. This is quite a bit of information, but when you take a look at the survey questions and then the columns of answers that you get for those, we have summed those things up. You can make some very gross looks at this information looking at sums, but if you really want to get into detail, there's an awful lot there.

QUESTIONER: Thanks, Bryan.

QUESTIONER: Jim Swickard here. Can you hear me?

MODERATOR: We did not, Jim. Go ahead.

QUESTIONER: Oh, okay. I had trouble un-muting.

This the Business and Commercial Aviation Magazine.

MODERATOR: Go ahead. We called out for you.

QUESTIONER: [Inaudible] -- the study was that it wasn't really based on what they called hard data, as they used. It had too much anecdotal structure.

Given the fact that the responsibility for the aircraft safety always, always without fail, rests with the

pilot in command, whether it is a Piper Cub or your 747, it would seem to me that all perceptions of danger would start at the anecdotal or perceived level by the pilot in command, and therefore, what is wrong with that kind of data? Does hindsight by the FAA trump pilot's judgment in the cockpit? That is a question that to me is easily answered, but your study is in a format that will disseminate valuable information across the community in my opinion. Can you comment on that?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, I can't comment on that. I have said several times that the utility of the data will be what the community says, the aviation safety community says, is the utility of the data. The FAA has offered their opinion. You have just quoted some of it, and I have made the point that at NASA, analysis of that data was, in fact, not our plan.

Now, I would remind everyone again -- I would like to re-ground the discussion -- what we at NASA did was to sponsor research into a data collection methodology. In fact, I hope it is determined to be valuable by some group in the community.

We rejected inappropriately, I believe - rather

using inappropriate language, we rejected a FOIA request for the release of the raw data. As administrator, I said that I thought the language chosen, the rationale chosen was not appropriate, that we would release what data could be released subject to the two concerns which are part of the FOIA that have to do with the protection of commercial confidential information voluntarily submitted and pilot anonymity.

We have made an initial step at that. We have promised to do so by the end of this year. We have done so, barely. That is all that we have ever, in fact, been asked for was to release the data, and it is all that we have ever promised, and we are trying to do that.

I simply can't go beyond that in offering opinions or prognostications or judgments or guesses about the utility of the data to the aviation safety community.

MODERATOR: Thanks, Mike.

We will go to the Christian Science Monitor now, Alexandra Marks. Are you on, Alexandra?

QUESTIONER: I just had to un-mute. Can you hear me?

MODERATOR: Yes.

QUESTIONER: One of the things that strikes me is that you have said, Dr. Griffin, over and over again that the whole point of this was to look at different types of survey methodology, and one thing I don't think I have quite gleaned from the conversation is what was learned about survey methodology in this process. I mean, the data notwithstanding in terms of this was evidently something to figure out how the best way to answer questions, clearly, you must have learned something from that perspective.

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, this survey was completed before I was actually even nominated for my current position. So I don't know that I personally have learned anything about how survey methodologies could be conducted.

There was a report published by Battelle on the survey methodology and I would encourage you to read it, and that report cites its own conclusions about the methodology.

MODERATOR: Thanks, Mike.

We now go to ABC Radio with Rusty Lutz. Rusty, are you there?

[No response.]

MODERATOR: All right. NBC News, Tony Capri.

[No response.]

MODERATOR: All right. Washington Post, Mark Kaufman.

QUESTIONER: How about The Washington Post, Del Wilber, instead?

MODERATOR: I tried to get everybody on the list.

QUESTIONER: Just to reiterate one last time -- I'm sorry there has been a lot of this -- there are no plans from you guys or others you have given the data to in the government to actually do an analysis of it. You are going to leave that up to the broader aviation community, and is there any lessons you have taken back from this whole thing that would be useful for air travelers to know at all?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Again, I have looked at some -- there's 29,000 lines, as has been frequently cited, to this data. I have seen a few of them. It is hard for me -- and bear in mind, I am a frequent airline passenger, as well as a pilot, and it is hard for me to see any data here that traveling public would care about or ought to care about, but it is also not for me to prescribe what

others may care about.

We were asked to release the data, and I said that we would, and we have done that. I think everyone on this call understands how I feel about the requirement for NASA to be a very open agency. When in the past three years, issues have come up about whether NASA was being open or not, I think you have all seen that if there were going to be any errors made, I would err on the side of openness, and that is what we have done here.

Now we have legal obligations, as I have said in numerous times, to protect the people who submit the data, and we have tried to attend to those legal obligations. I think Bryan and his team have done well, but subject to those limitations, we will be as open with this data as we can be.

NASA did not and does not have any plans to, as you say, analyze it. That is for the broader community. We don't have any plans to fund these particular researchers to continue on, and we never did. The original documentation citing the study shows clearly that it was intended to end in 2004. We, in fact, extended it for two years, so that if the methodology and the results were

determined to be of value by the safety community, that they could be transitioned appropriately to them. So we have funded this for several extra years beyond its originally intended lifetime.

I will say again I think NASA has gone the extra mile here and beyond. I think we have received some appropriate criticism for the language involving our FOIA denial, and I have corrected that multiple times, over and over again.

I think to criticize us for not having plans that would go beyond the original ground rules for the study is inappropriate.

MODERATOR: Thanks, Mike.

QUESTIONER: Thank you.

MODERATOR: The next question is from the Associated Press, Trevor Thompson.

QUESTIONER: Hi. We are just looking at the data now, and it is very difficult to ask some questions without having had a chance to read and review it ahead of time, but it looks like you have dis-aggregated from the main dataset, data about the flight hours and flight legs flown by pilots, and it is my understanding that information is

essential to link back to the record to make appropriate estimates of the rate. Can you tell me why you did that and whether we can still make sense of these data because of that dis-aggregation?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Bryan, would you comment on that?

MR. O'CONNOR: Yes. Again, what we were trying to do is make sure that we didn't have information from these surveys that were lining up in a way that would threaten the anonymity of the pilot, but we tried to keep the information but disaggregate it, so you could see what the total hours and the total legs are, and we did that so that you would not be coming up with a fingerprint for that pilot, if you follow my analogy.

MODERATOR: Thanks, Bryan.

We now go to Reuters, Will Dunham. Will, are you on?

[No response.]

MODERATOR: All right. We will start back at the top of the list with the Houston Chronicle. Mark, are you on still?

QUESTIONER: Yes. Can you hear me all right?

MODERATOR: Yes.

QUESTIONER: Okay. Could you maybe in a general sense discuss what the sort of safety threats the original study was intended to sort of uncover? As I understand it, it was to look ahead beyond traditional reporting methods to see if there were things on the horizon that may not be great threats necessarily, but threats nonetheless that could be dealt with to make the system safer.

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Mark, I think that is a fair characterization. Folks were looking to develop a methodology that would unearth precursor information, the kinds of data that after an accident, one looks back and says, "Oh, I could have seen this coming." That is a goal in all fields of safety. That is, I think, the goal here.

QUESTIONER: Is there any way to more broadly describe what you're after, though?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: I would not want to go beyond that at this time.

MODERATOR: All right. Let's go to Bloomberg News again. Is Susanna Ray on? Did you join us?

QUESTIONER: Hi. Can you hear me this time?

MODERATOR: Yes.

QUESTIONER: Oh, good. I guess my question is similar to the one that was just asked. I am a little bit confused after all of this. If there was never an intent to analyze the results, then I don't really understand why the study was undertaken. Maybe you could just explain that again for me. Thank you.

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: What I said was that there was not an intent by NASA to analyze the data; that NASA was funding the development of a potentially useful survey methodology, one which had not been tried before. NASA also funded, for a certain period of time, efforts to transition the data into the operational aviation safety community. The transition of that data allowed it to be, and allows it to be, utilized by the aviation safety profession if individual elements of that group find it useful.

I think we just heard a commentator from Business Aviation magazine point out certain aspects of the survey that he personally felt would be useful. Good. I am glad to hear that, but I have to distinguish between NASA's goals for the underlying research and the broader goals that the aviation safety community might have.

QUESTIONER: Sure. And I am just trying to make sure I understand it. So you basically were just paying for a study that you planned to provide to the aviation safety community?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: That we planned to transition to the aviation safety community, and again, what was important about the original intent of the study was that it was seeking to develop and looking at a new and different methodology.

QUESTIONER: Which meant going to the pilot directly?

MODERATOR: I'm sorry. We have got to move on.

Let's go to Matt Hosford. Are you on? ABC News.

QUESTIONER: ABC News is on. Matt had to jump off the line. It is Laura Marquez with ABC News.

Doctor, I just want to go back to what you were just talking about, about the idea being that there was a concern that there were accidents, and you thought if there was a way to try and see if those accidents could be prevented by gathering this information, all the better. That makes complete sense.

I am still very confused, and I think several

reporters have asked the same question. Why would you just dump 16,000 pages of responses without actually having some sort of "here is what we have found in regards to the original premise which was to try to find a way to reduce accidents before they happen?"

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, we are being criticized for doing what we were asked to do, which was to release the raw data. So you are now characterizing the release of 16,000 pages of data as something that we shouldn't have done, and yet that is what we were asked to do.

We were not asked to analyze it. We had no plans to analyze it. We never as NASA had plans to analyze it. I don't know how many different ways that I can say that.

We transitioned the methodology, not the data. We transitioned the methodology to the aviation safety community, and they will use it or not as they see fit.

MODERATOR: Thanks, Mike.

We will go to Gannett, John Yaukey. Are you on?

[No response.]

MODERATOR: All right. Lisa Tabb, are you on?

Did you join us?

[No response.]

MODERATOR: All right. Asahi Shimbun, Toshi Katsuda.

[No response.]

MODERATOR: Baltimore Examiner, Karl Hille.

[No response.]

MODERATOR: All right. Allen Stahler?

[No response.]

MODERATOR: Associated Press, Rita Beamish.

QUESTIONER: Still here. Thank you.

Dr. Griffin, I just wanted to ask you because you have stated repeatedly that this was just a methodology research, and I am wondering. There are documents, planning documents from NASA that were used in presentations during this program, as well as testimony from people even before Congress who worked on the survey that said that it was intended as an ongoing tracking tool, and in fact, it was to include interviews not only with pilots, but with air traffic controllers, with flight attendants and mechanics, and that, in fact, this would become something like NASA does with ASRS, an ongoing project that could, in fact, as you say, be used by the

greater aviation community to help enhance safety.

I wonder how you respond to those people who have characterized it differently who were in on the planning of it, and also to just sort of go back over some of the territory that has been covered, does it have no value today to take a unique survey with thousands of interviews, done in a different manner, because this is survey methodology of a form that is not used in any of the FAA's programs -- they have other programs, but that with an 80-percent response rate by pilots, do you still see that type of program as having no value, and what about the original intent?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: I did not say the survey results had no value. I said that the survey methodology had not been peer-reviewed. I said that there have not been peer-reviewed publications resulting from this research, and I said that the data which had gathered had not been validated. That is what I said.

QUESTIONER: Well, you said that the flying public would -- there wouldn't be nothing useful to yourself or the flying public.

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: I said that I did not --

having looked at a snapshot of the data, I did not see anything that as a member of the flying public would affect me one way or the other. Now --

QUESTIONER: The thousands --

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Rita, you need to stop.

Now, let me answer. What was the first part of your question again?

QUESTIONER: I was just wondering if you had any comment on how this program has been characterized differently.

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Yes. Okay. If you go back to the documents involving the creation of the program, you will see that my remarks are correct.

I think it should be no surprise to anyone on this call that researchers being funded by the U.S. Government will always have a strong belief that their research work should be continued on ad infinitum and should be extended into an unending operational phase, and I think that is what the case is here.

I have no doubt that the researchers performing the research would like for the Government to fund them to continue it.

In fact, in an earlier incarnation, when the National Academy of Sciences was asked to review the NAOMS project, they stated out right that they saw no need for it to continue.

MODERATOR: Thanks, Mike.

We will go back to Miles O'Brien, CNN.

QUESTIONER: Can you hear me? Can you hear me now?

MODERATOR: Yes.

QUESTIONER: Dr. Griffin, I am just curious. If you could just run through it, whatever you may think about the validity of the report. As I go through what I have seen here, I do see comments, a lot of talk about fatigue, a lot of talk about crowded airspace.

Is there anything as a pilot that you have been able to glean from this that should cause some additional concern and might give us some reason to believe that the system is not as safe as we believe?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: No.

MODERATOR: Thanks, Mike.

Going now to NBC News, Tom Costello.

QUESTIONER: No. I'm good. Thank you very much,

Dr. Griffin.

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: You're welcome, Tom.

MODERATOR: L.A. Times, Jennifer Oldham.

QUESTIONER: Yes, I am here still.

Dr. Griffin, could you tell us a little bit about how you would compare this survey with other types of surveys that NASA has done in terms of peer review? Typically, when NASA does something like this, does a peer review take place and then you release the data, or is this an unusual occurrence, and it has kind of played out differently than you would do it otherwise?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, the normal process in research in science and engineering is that when a new study of this type or any type is to be done, that the methodology by which the study is to be done, as well as the results obtained from it, would be peer-reviewed by appropriate professionals. I am searching for words because it is a generic process, not one specific to this case, and the data when collected would normally be validated against certain bench-mark results.

When you are doing new things, there is always the issue of how do you tie the new work that you are doing

to already known or established results, how do you verify and validate it. Those things haven't been done in this case, and that is the point that we have made several times which is why we have consistently said we are willing to release the data, but we, NASA, are not willing to draw conclusions from it.

I don't know how else to answer the question.

MODERATOR: Thanks, Mike.

Let's go back to Reuters, Julie Vorman.

QUESTIONER: No, thanks. I'm good.

MODERATOR: All right. CBS, Carter Yang.

QUESTIONER: I'm fine. Thank you.

MODERATOR: All right. New York Times, Matt Wald?

QUESTIONER: Dr. Griffin, you have twice said that the National Academy of Sciences concluded that NAOMS should be terminated, but looking at their actual recommendations, they said, quote, "NASA should combine the National Aviation Operational Monitoring Service methodology and resources with the Aviation Safety Reporting System Program data to identify aviation safety trends."

It is also clear from their report that they envisioned the process being extended to cabin crews, maintenance personnel, and other categories that the initial research didn't get to.

Does NASA have plans to follow the recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: I don't have those recommendations in front of me, and that is certainly not the verbiage that I do have.

I would say, again, as I have said several times, that the FAA under its ASAP program has put in place survey methodologies to service, to deal, with pilots and mechanics and flight attendants and dispatchers and others in the aviation community.

I would also point out when you compare NAOMS to ASRS that you are comparing apples and oranges. Under ASRS, pilots are granted immunity, and that was not possible in the NAOMS project, and so to combine them is really a contradiction in terms. One would have to establish under ASRS a new set of questions, but one would still have to give the pilots the guarantee of immunity that ASRS does today and which was not provided in the

NAOMS program.

QUESTIONER: Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thanks, Mike.

I think we have time for one more. We are going to go to USA Today, Alan Levin.

QUESTIONER: Hi. Thank you very much.

You know, in looking at these results very briefly, one of the things that pilots say is that they don't trust the ASAP program. They say they have been -- this is from the data you released today. They say that, you know, it is not really anonymous, that they sometimes fear they get punished as a result of that.

Do you still believe that those programs are adequate to tease out the hidden risks out there in the system?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: That calls for a conclusion that I am not professionally qualified to make.

So I am sorry.

I would point you to the fact that we at NASA working in collaboration with the FAA have extensive research programs going on in aviation safety. I would remind you that we have an incredibly safe system today.

Can it be made safer? People are trying to do that and I think everyone hopes that that is the case. But I certainly find nothing coming from these results that would indicate that anyone is to be found wanting.

MODERATOR: Thanks, Mike.

That is going to have to conclude today's media conference on NAOMS. I would like to thank Mike Griffin and Bryan O'Connor for taking part today.

Once again, for those online, you can get the data at www.NASA.gov.

Thank you very much.

[End of NASA Media Briefing of December 31, 2007.]

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