



WHY WOULD THE PRIVATE SECTOR WANT THE FAA TO GO PRIVATE?

News / Personalities



On Wednesday Allan McArtor, Chairman and CEO of Airbus Group Inc., the U.S.holding company for the North American activities of Airbus Group, spoke at a luncheon at the International Aviation Club Washington, D.C. in which he made it clear the private sector should oversee the functions of U.S air traffic control system.

I guess letting the wolves (private sector) oversee the safety and care of the chickens. Oh he throws out the same political lines he wants the FAA “free from political shenanigans... It’s high time to move beyond words and into action.”

McArtor said, “I want the safest ATC system in the world, but I also want the most efficient system in the world. We have the safest system in the world, but that’s not the issue. It’s about efficiency.”

McArtor wants the FAA “to get out of the business of controlling air traffic and to focus on what it does best, safety and certification.” So what does he really mean? In McArtor's speech he gave no examples on how the private sector would do a better job at making air travel more efficient. There were a lot of buzz words but nothing of substance.

When McArtor speaks of the private sector he is really saying the airlines would take control. Does that include the private sector paying for ongoing infrastructure costs given their low profit margin? It sounds to me that safety maybe compromised by profits.

McArtor stated that when Canada and New Zealand ATC systems turned private they saw reduced delays and greater efficiencies while maintaining safety standards. In 1996, Canada's ATC system went private to a company called NavCanada.

At that time there were numerous promises made. For example, better work conditions for air traffic controllers, improved safety conditions, better technology and newer ATC infrastructure. However, when you talk with passengers and air traffic controllers in private they will tell you conditions in many cases have gotten worse and believe that government did a better job.

Canada's air traffic controllers work longer days and more consecutive days in a week than U.S. air traffic controllers. Under the NavCanada air traffic controllers went from working 5 days, with 4 days off and they only worked 8 hour shifts. Today controllers work 6 days, with 3 days off and 10-12 hour shifts with a minimum of 10 hours between shifts. Air traffic controllers can work overtime on a regular basis due to a shortage of air traffic controllers. This does not sound like a system that would serve this country well.

When the UK privatized its air traffic control system, at that time lots of promises were made. Again when you talk with air traffic controller and passengers they will all say the system was much better when the government ran it. A common theme among countries that have privatized their ATC system is when something goes wrong they like to blame it on the events of 9/11.

McArtor wants to see a corporate national ATC system that would include a board of directors representing all aspects of the industry, in other words airline executives. McArtor said, “an all-new company with a fresh start,” allowing the FAA, “to get out of the business of controlling air traffic and to focus on what it does best, safety and certification.”

Remember when Jeff Smisek was CEO of Continental Airlines (now President and CEO of United Airlines) [said](#) the tarmac rule was stupid, insane and warned it would lead to a sharp increase in cancellations. Well it turns out it was one of the best passenger safety rules passed by congress and implemented by the FAA. Today passengers no longer sit on the airport tarmacs waiting to disembark or for takeoff in a hot aircraft. See United [Flight 270](#) Passengers Stranded On Tarmac Nearly Nine Hours and also Lowest Numbers Of Tarmac Delays On Record In [2014](#).

Do you remember when Allegiant Air was fined for violating DOT advertising rule in which the company failed to show the true cost of a ticket to its passengers. At the time Maurice J. Gallagher was and continues to be the CEO of the carrier.

Just recently the DOT fined Empire Airlines (Tim Komberec, President and CEO) for operating an aircraft after it was hit by lightning. As the maintenance manual requires the propeller must be removed from service and inspected for damage. Empire operated the aircraft on 35 revenue flights before removing its propeller from service and sending it to an authorized repair station for the required inspection. So who would McArtor like to sit on this corporate board? Maybe Smisek,

Gallagher, and Komberec?

Allan McArtor professional career; From 1987 to 1989 McArtor served as Administrator of the FAA through an appointment by President Ronald Reagan. Remember the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization or PATCO strike. During McArtor's tenure he did absolutely nothing to bring back those air traffic controllers. McArtor and the administration were not concerned about safety nor the concerns of air traffic controllers. It was not until the next presidency that the focus of safety and the air traffic controllers' concerns began to be addressed. But now McArtor is concerned with efficiency.

From 1989 to 1994 McArtor served in a number of senior management positions at FedEx. In 2000, McArtor founded Legend Airlines. The company was based out of Dallas Love Field, Texas as a regional airline and in 2005, the company filed for bankruptcy.

At the luncheon McArtor said under his plan he would like to see congress fund this proposal for five to seven years, giving this private company time enough to be self-funding. He suggested carriers could pay US\$50.00 per aircraft. "I don't think there's going to be any resistance from the community. I think you will get applause."

Back in June Rep. Bill Shuster, R-Pa., who is chairman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, said the ATC system should be removed from the FAA and allow a not-for-profit corporation oversee those functions. He said fees from the airlines would save billions of dollars and provide more stable funding than congressional appropriations. So he supports privatization because "the do nothing congress" can't do its job. This is not about saving taxpayer dollars or safety. This is about airlines doing what they want to do. Like fly unsafe planes, charging exorbitant amount of money for passenger tickets and not having to worry about fines for sitting on a tarmac with passengers for 9 hours.

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