

Remarks Prior to a Meeting on the Recovery Efforts for TWA Flight 800 in Jamaica, New York

July 25, 1996

The President. [*The President's remarks are joined in progress*—have a briefing from all the folks who have been working on this terrible tragedy, making an effort to recover the bodies as quickly as possible and find out what caused the crash. And I'm looking forward to that briefing and having a chance to thank them for the efforts they've made and then to go over and meet with the families.

I want to thank the Members of the Congress, the Governor, and other officials from New York, and particularly the Ambassadors from France and Italy for being here with me. And I'm anxious to get on with the morning.

Thank you.

Q. Are you satisfied with the efforts to recover the bodies even as the search for clues as to the cause of this tragedy is underway?

The President. I will have a statement after we meet this morning, and I'd prefer to wait and answer all my questions then.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 9:40 a.m. in Port Authority Building 14 at John F. Kennedy International Airport. In his remarks, the President referred to Ambassador to the U.S. from Italy, Ferdinando Salleo, and Ambassador to the U.S. from France, Francois Bujon de l'Estang. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks Announcing Measures to Improve Aviation Safety and Security in Jamaica

July 25, 1996

Good afternoon. Hillary and I have just met with the families of those who lost their lives on TWA Flight 800. I'd like to talk a little about that meeting and describe for you the immediate steps I have ordered to improve airline safety and security.

These families had suffered enormous pain, the loss of a parent, a child, a husband, a wife, a brother, a nephew, a niece. They

were still in a great deal of pain, and I know that we can all understand not only their pain but the frustration that they feel at the time it is taking to recover their loved ones and to get answers.

I also want you to know, however, that an awful lot of them expressed gratitude to me for the efforts that are being made by the Government personnel, the TWA personnel assigned to the families, and the many volunteers who are working hard to make this awful experience at least bearable for them.

We have listened to the victims' families. While much has been done by many to assist them, they believe, and I agree, that there should be in place in the Federal Government a specific office that has the responsibility and the capability to assist victims' families in tragedies like this one. That is the case where FEMA does the work when there are natural disasters; it was the case in Oklahoma City. That is not the case today with regard to airline crashes. And I intend to work with Congress to see that it does happen.

We do not yet know what caused Flight 800 to crash, whether it was mechanical failure or sabotage, but we will find out. Just last night the divers who were braving the waters of the Atlantic to search for answers recovered both flight data recorders. Our experts are analyzing their contents at this very moment. This is a major step toward unraveling the mystery of Flight 800.

In the meantime, let me again ask every American not to jump to conclusions. This investigation is moving forward with great care and even greater determination. While we seek the cause of the disaster, let us all agree that we must not wait to alleviate the concerns of the American people about air safety and air security.

In the wake of the ValueJet crash and TWA 800, that concern has increased. The safety record of the United States aviation is unmatched in the world, and air travel remains the safest means of transportation. But that is of no consolation when a single crash, whatever its cause, can take so many lives.

Beginning in 1993, our administration took steps to improve aviation safety and security. We proposed a detailed plan to overhaul and modernize the air traffic control system. We