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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3517

July 25, 1997

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Mr. James B. Hall
Chairman
National Transportation Safety Board
490 L'Enfant Plaza, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20594

Dear Chairman Hall:

At the July 10, 1997 hearing of the Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Aviation I asked you several questions regarding the NTSB's investigation of the July 17, 1996 crash of TWA Flight 800. I appreciate your taking the time to appear before the subcommittee. Unfortunately, I only had five minutes to ask questions. I have several additional questions, and would appreciate it if you could respond in writing as soon as possible. The questions are listed below.

- 1) I understand that the NTSB conducted a test in August of 1996 in the Mojave desert on the fuel tank temperature of a 747. Has the NTSB conducted any tests to recreate, as close as possible, the type of weather conditions that TWA Flight 800 experienced on July 17, 1996 in the hours prior to the crash? If yes, what were the results of these tests?
- 2) Some NTSB officials have stated that the number three fuel tank may have been the ignition source for the explosion, and that three of the four engines were drawing fuel from the number three tank. If this is, in fact, the theory being expounded by the NTSB, is this standard operating procedure for a 747?
- 3) Has the NTSB been able to find any example of a fuel tank explosion in an airborne commercial jet aircraft that was ignited by an internal ignition source?
- 4) Is it true that an official from the NTSB asserted to ABC News "Primetime" that an old wiring problem on U.S. Navy jets related to saltwater corrosion was reason to suspect a wiring problem on a 747 was a possible internal ignition source for the explosion in TWA Flight 800? If true, what evidence does the NTSB have that the wiring system in a Navy jet is similar to that of a 747, and that the wiring in a 747 is susceptible to the same type of corrosion as that of a Navy jet?

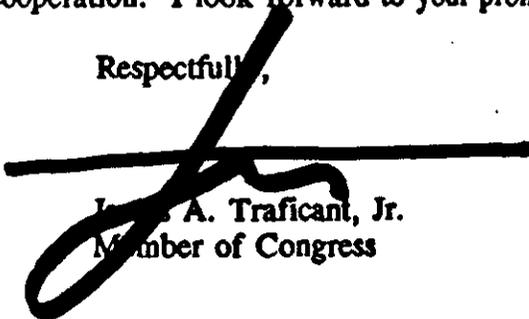
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- 5) You indicated at the July 10th hearing that the NTSB has not yet uncovered any physical evidence of a mechanical malfunction. At the same time, the NTSB has not been able to rule out the possibility that the crash caused by a missile or explosive device. If this is the case, why has the NTSB, on several occasions, indicated to the media that the likely cause of the crash was mechanical malfunction?
- 6) Given the lack of physical evidence of a mechanical malfunction, and given the large number of eyewitnesses who saw an object ascending towards TWA Flight 800 prior to its explosion, why hasn't the NTSB given more credence to the missile theory?
- 7) To follow-up on question #6, why is the NTSB conducting extensive and expensive tests to determine the plausibility of mechanical malfunction, but not conducting tests to examine the plausibility of a missile or explosive device as the cause of the crash?

Thank you for your cooperation. I look forward to your prompt response.

Respectfully,



James A. Traficant, Jr.
Member of Congress

JAT/pm

c: The Honorable John J. Duncan, Jr.
The Honorable William Lipinski