TESTIMONY OF EUGENE D. JUBA, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT FOR FINANCE SERVICES, AIR TRAFFIC ORGANIZATION, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION ON THE GAO'S REPORT ON AVIATION WEATHER SERVICE RESTRUCTURING

February 26, 2008

Good Afternoon, Chairman Lampson, Congressman Inglis, and Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Gene Juba, and I am the Senior Vice President for Finance in the FAA's Air Traffic Organization. I am honored to be here today to discuss the findings and recommendations of the GAO regarding FAA's provision of aviation weather services from NOAA's National Weather Service. FAA believes that working together with NWS, we will be able to fulfill the new requirements for aviation weather services which FAA recently sent to the NWS, and move towards a better alignment of current services with the future requirements envisioned in the NextGen Concept of Operations.

The Federal Aviation Administration is responsible for ensuring safe, orderly, and efficient air travel in the National Airspace System. The legislative foundation of the Federal government's regulation of civil aviation was the Air Commerce Act of 1926. This landmark legislation was passed in the belief that the aviation industry could not reach its full potential without Federal action to establish and maintain safety standards. The Act charged the Secretary of Commerce with fostering air commerce, issuing and enforcing air traffic rules, licensing pilots, certifying aircraft, establishing runways and operating and maintaining aids to navigation.

The Department of Commerce continued oversight and regulation of civil aviation until 1938, when the Civil Aeronautics Act transferred Federal civil aviation responsibilities to a new independent agency, the Civil Aeronautics Authority. In 1958, passage of the Federal Aviation Act transferred the CAA's functions to the newly created Federal Aviation Agency, and the FAA was born. The FAA became the Federal Aviation Administration upon the creation of the Department of Transportation in 1967, and the FAA's becoming one of the modal organizations within the new Department.

All through these years, the FAA and the Weather Bureau cooperated to provide weather forecast services for pilots to improve the safety of the nation's aviation system. A formal arrangement by which the National Weather Service would provide aviation weather services directly through co-location of NWS meteorologists at FAA facilities was established following the NTSB's report on the 1977 crash of Southern Airways flight 242. The NTSB's recommendation called for the FAA to, "formulate rules and procedures for the timely dissemination by air traffic controllers of all available severe weather information to inbound and outbound flights in the terminal areas." Based on this recommendation, the FAA, with the assistance of the NWS, created the Center Weather Service Units (CWSU), which are located at each of the FAA's 21 Air Route Traffic Control Centers (ARTCC) across the United States.

This relationship between the FAA and the NWS was codified in 1994, when Public Law 103-272 directed that, "The Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration shall make recommendations to the Secretary of Commerce on providing meteorological

services necessary for the safe and efficient movement of aircraft in air commerce. In providing the services, the Secretary shall cooperate with the Administrator and give complete consideration to those recommendations." (49 U.S.C. 44720(a))

Presently, the FAA alone spends over $200 million a year on aviation weather services, through over 40 observing systems, processes and communications services. This is independent of the NWS spending for aviation weather forecasting and research. FAA spends approximately $12 million a year to support the 84 NWS employees located at 21 CWSUs to provide services to FAA traffic management personnel located at the air traffic control facilities throughout the National Airspace System (NAS). The NWS also provides aviation weather services through entities such as the Alaska Aviation Weather Office, the Volcanic Ash Advisory Centers, the Aviation Weather Center in Kansas City, Missouri, and Weather Forecast Offices. NWS provides warning, forecasts, meteorological advice and consultation for FAA and other customers throughout all phases of flight; pre-flight, planning, and operations.

In recent years, the FAA has undertaken a number of initiatives to assess and improve the performance of the Center Weather Service Units. FAA found that the CWSUs were not providing the same level of services at all of its locations, and the services and forecasts were not standardized across the 21 locations. There was also little collaboration or communication between the different CWSUs. In addition, neither the FAA nor the NWS had a formal quality assurance program for CWSU products and services.

To address these concerns, FAA requested that the NWS restructure its aviation weather services to provide improved services in a more efficient, performance-based process. While the NWS was developing its proposal for restructuring its aviation weather services, FAA conducted a market survey to determine if the private sector could provide the weather services FAA needed. Ten organizations, including government laboratories and private sector firms, responded to the market survey that they could provide the services FAA requested. The NWS submitted its restructuring proposal to FAA in October 2006. In April 2007, FAA declined the NWS proposal for restructuring its aviation weather services provided to FAA, primarily because, in the intervening time, we had initiated an internal review of our requirements, and had not yet completed this review. The results of that review are the new requirements which were provided to the NWS in January 2008.

However, we are serious about effective inter-agency cooperation and continue to work with the NWS on improving CWSU services. We decided that we would refine our requirements for the services provided by the CWSUs because our existing requirements were too broad to ensure the efficiency and cost effectiveness of the services. Also, as GAO found, FAA did not have a system in place to provide quality assurance of the services provided by the NWS, and thus could not objectively evaluate the accuracy, efficiency and cost effectiveness of the Center Weather Service Units.

The FAA agrees with the recommendations of the GAO, and in building the new requirements for the CWSU service, added a component of performance evaluation. The

performance mechanism calls for setting up a team of individuals from both FAA and NWS, which will convene regularly and monitor and provide recommendations on CWSU services based upon a negotiated set of performance metrics. The goal of this team is to install a mechanism that will improve CWSU service on a continuing basis and enhance the FAA-NWS aviation weather relationship at the same time. Most importantly, we must ensure that aviation weather services meet the needs of the aviation community.

In January 2008, FAA provided NWS with revised and clarified requirements. The new performance based requirements request a new approach to how the products are generated and delivered. The requirements address deficiencies the FAA has identified with CWSU service, such as a fragmented approach to aviation weather forecasting, with 21 aviation weather forecasts developed independently of one another, and sometimes producing inconsistent products across the NAS. FAA has requested that forecasts across regional boundaries be consistent and that more attention be devoted to areas with "active" weather conditions, and less to areas where weather patterns are having less impact on aviation operations. The new requirements also request CWSU services on a 24 hour a day, 7 days a week basis, rather than the current 16 hours a day, 7 days a week services. Planes are increasingly operating on a 24/7 basis, and aviation weather services need to evolve to meet that demand.

FAA views the new requirements as moving current aviation weather services towards the FAA's future requirements envisioned in the NextGen Concept of Operations. The

NWS is the team lead for developing the aviation weather services observing systems, forecasting services, and communications delivery systems for the inter-agency NextGen system effort, and FAA believes that the new requirements for CWSU services will help NWS better align itself with the NextGen requirements.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, the FAA and the NWS are doing their utmost to improve the CWSU service. FAA has continuously held meetings with the NWS throughout the requirements development process, and continues to hold bi-weekly meetings with NWS during the proposal development process to ensure that the NWS is provided sufficient information and opportunity to develop an improved CWSU service. We believe the NWS is committed to providing their best response to these requirements. The FAA looks forward to the NWS's future concept of operations for the Center Weather Service Units, and hopes to continue our cooperative relationship well into the future to reduce the impact weather has on aviation.

We thank the GAO for their careful analysis and positive recommendations to institute performance measurements and metrics to improve the quality and cost effectiveness of aviation weather services. We also welcome Congress' assistance and counsel as we work with the National Weather Service to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Center Weather Service Unit services.

This concludes my remarks, and I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.