

Independence for FAA Urged

By Martin Weil

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Spokesman for the nation's airline pilots and flight controllers, groups which seemed at odds at times during an air crash hearing underway here, joined yesterday in calling for an independent Federal Aviation Administration.

Both J. J. O'Donnell of the Air Line Pilots Association and John F. Leyden of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization, agreed that the FAA, which regulates the airways, should be made an independent agency at the Cabinet level.

"The system and the regulatory agency are reactors and not planners," Leyden said. "And we pay the price. By We, I mean the controllers and the pilots and the flying public."

Leyden and O'Donnell were interviewed by Jim Clarke on WMAL-TV's Headliner program at a time when a federal hearing is under way here in to the Dec. 1 crash of a Trans World Airlines jetliner in Virginia that killed 92 persons.

The National Transportation Safety Board hearing is looking into the nation's entire air traffic control system, which is operated by the FAA.

Leyden, who said his traffic controllers organization has called several times for sweeping reforms of the FAA, said in an interview yesterday that the agency has been "continually emasculated" since being absorbed in 1967 by the U.S. Department of Transportation.

With DOT responsible for railroads and highways as well as air transportation, the De-

partment has "no commonality of function," Leyden asserted.

Instead, he said, "there has been internal fighting" between the FAA and its parent agency. Some of it, he suggested, came about because of what he said was an effort by DOT to resurrect rail transportation at the airlines' expense.

O'Donnell said that the resources available to the FAA are too often allocated as a result of political influence.

Both he and Leyden asked that a professional career administrator be placed at the

head of the FAA rather than a political appointee. A career administrator, who would remain in his post while political administrations change, "can follow up the plans he initiates," Leyden said.

After Leyden recommended that the FAA be autonomous, with its chief free of political influence, O'Donnell proposed that the agency be raised to Cabinet level. Leyden concurred.

Leyden said he expects to make a similar recommendation when he testifies this week at the Safety Board

hearings into the crash of TWA flight 514. An FAA spokesman declined last night to comment on the proposals.

The agency and its operations have come under close scrutiny at the safety board hearings, which begin their second week today.

Documents compiled by the board for the hearings indicate that four years before the Dec. 1 crash TWA warned the FAA that confusion and misunderstanding surrounded the kind of approach clearance the ill-fated flight 514 received from air traffic controllers.