

FAA Probe Panel Quits In Protest

Washington

All three members of an independent panel investigating Federal Aviation Administration failures in the field of safety have resigned because their efforts were thwarted by transportation Secretary Claude Brinegar, the head of the panel said yesterday.

"After Brinegar limited our investigation and announced he would appoint his own panel (to investigate the same thing), it would have been a waste of time for us to go on," said former Representative Richard Shoup, chairman of the panel named by FAA chief Alexander Butterfield.

Shoup said a personality clash between Butterfield and Brinegar, who is leaving his post at the Transportation Department in two weeks, was to blame for the problems his panel encountered. He said Brinegar, in effect, "came through and said: 'I am the bos.'"

Shoup and the other two members — David Thomas of Washington, a former FAA deputy administrator, and Paul Soderlind of Fish-tale, Mont., the former chief pilot for Northwest Airlines — submitted a joint letter of resignation just five days after their appointment January 4.

Butterfield appointed the panel after a congressional report sharply criticized the FAA's role in aviation safety. He ordered the group to come up with recommendations to correct "any deficiencies in the FAA from the point of safety," Shoup said.

The congressional report charged the FAA had delayed ordering safety measures and was too sympathetic with the industry it regulates. New urgency was added to the safety question by a report Thursday that airline fatality rates have climbed steadily for the past three years and that 467 fatalities recorded in 1974 was the highest total since 1960.

Shoup said the only restriction placed on the investigation by Butterfield was that it be completed promptly "in that it involved the safety of millions of people who were flying."

"After we had started work," Shoup said, "the secretary of the Department of Transportation (Brinegar) limited the scope of our investigation to making sure the dates and times in the congressional report were correct.

"He also said he would name his own panel to investigate the things we were looking into. We felt we could not do anything to contribute to the safety of the flying public under those limitations and that we would just waste the taxpayers money because we were so hampered."

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