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Hon. Scott J. Bloch
Remarks at Special Counsel's Public Servant Award Event
Dallas, TX
October 6, 2005

I would like to thank you all for coming today and welcome you. I would like to especially welcome Anne, and her husband, Gary, and their friends, as well as members of my staff who have traveled here to be with our Dallas office. Thank you, Tony for your remarks.

I am honored to be here in our Dallas field office to present the first Public Servant Award during my tenure as Special Counsel. Thanks to today's honoree, Anne Whiteman, I could relax on my flight to this city, and I personally appreciate that.

Throughout history, society has depended on individuals to step forward and speak truth to power. From the time of Socrates, to Paul Revere and Patrick Henry, Ernie Fitzgerald, who blew the whistle on cost overruns on defense spending in the 1970s to Serpico, society needs these lamplighters of integrity who are willing to sacrifice their comfort for the common good. The founders of this country assumed that the populace would need people of integrity and virtue who would place the needs of others above their own good. Society needs these people to tell their stories when they are aware of public officials engaging in corruption, or when they see government operating in a way that endangers the public.

This award embodies what our Agency is able to do for real people. Too often those who speak out against government are ignored, or worse, ridiculed, for their efforts to bring light to serious issues. Too often those who have the courage to do the right thing are not thanked or recognized for their contributions to the federal government or the safety of the public. That's why we are here today.

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Anne Whiteman has had a distinguished career with the Federal Aviation Administration. As a veteran 18-year air traffic controller at Dallas Fort Worth International Airport (DFW), Anne came forward because of her concern for air traffic safety and the flying public, no small issue in our country today.

She reported that air traffic controllers and management at DFW Terminal Radar Approach Control (known as TRACON) routinely covered up serious operational errors when aircraft flew too close to each other, which occurred on average once a month. These events often were neither reported by controllers or supervisors, nor investigated, in violation of FAA's own regulations.

This was a substantial and specific danger to public safety, but nobody in the FAA would listen to Ms. Whiteman's hotline complaints until ... OSC got the case in March 2004. We required an investigation under our statute, and the Department of Transportation Inspector General substantiated her allegations and concluded that the cover-ups represent safety deficiencies and undermine the public's confidence in the air traffic control system. In response to these findings, the agency took some disciplinary action against those involved, including a performance improvement plan, and required controllers to undergo retraining and certification in order to continue working at DFW. I know Anne believes the punishment should have been more severe and that more could have been done, but that is beyond our powers to control as FAA manages the facilities, not OSC.

This case garnered national news, (covered by many of you here today), and we believe will promote greater aviation safety over time. I think of recent news reports of other "near misses" that bring home the significance of what Anne started.

Thankfully, as a result of the investigation prompted by Ms. Whiteman's disclosures, DFW's operations have been brought into line with the FAA order. In addition, the facility is subject to periodic review by FAA to ensure its continued compliance with its order and its proper reporting and investigating of operational errors.

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To me this is a perfect example of a case where a civil servant was willing to take on “the establishment” to protect us all. She believed in this job, and more than anything, believed in our nation’s safety.

Doing the right thing in her case has been a long and arduous process for Ms. Whiteman. Over the past seven years she has repeatedly made these allegations to FAA and DOT officials. During that time she has endured considerable mistreatment by her co-workers and supervisors. Even after the Inspector General’s investigation, which substantiated her allegations, there has been no official recognition of her efforts to correct a significant agency problem.

Even though her agency wouldn’t listen at first, I’m pleased that the Office of the Special Counsel is the federal agency who listens to those individuals that too often no one else wants to listen to. We are the place federal whistleblowers can come to in confidence, with their concerns about wrongdoing in their agencies.

Anne was featured on the Oprah Winfrey show on September 30 and we watched that show. She was brave to do so, she did a great job, and I’m proud of her! It’s important to get the stories out, and that’s the point of being a whistleblower. This is an incredibly important story with far reaching consequences.

So, today, I am here to recognize in some small way, the contribution and courage of Anne Whiteman. Her disclosure had a somewhat happy ending: safer, more efficient management of air traffic at the Dallas Fort Worth International Airport. We thank her for her courage in reporting these allegations. We thank her for persistence in repeating allegations that apparently, no one wanted to hear or listen to. And we thank her for working so hard to help correct the misconduct of some of her FAA supervisors, and ultimately, helping to protect the public. We realize the work is not complete. Lamplighters like Anne, light the way for others, and help to improve the safety of the system.

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I would like to present Anne Whiteman with the 2005 Special Counsel's Public Servant Award. This award recognizes courageous whistleblowers like Ms. Whiteman and she is the fifth federal employee to get such an award, since 2001.

In addition to the certificate, we have this glass statue that will stand as a reminder to others that such efforts will not go unrecognized. Thank you, Anne.