



## For Immediate Release

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# Ambassador Carol B. Hallett to Receive the 2023 Donald D. Engen Aero Club Trophy for Aviation Excellence

Washington, DC – The Board of Governors of the Aero Club of Washington is pleased to announce that Ambassador Carol B. Hallett has been selected as the recipient of the 2023 Donald D. Engen Aero Club Trophy for Aviation Excellence. Hallett is being honored for her visionary leadership and lifelong dedication to shaping the future of aviation during her distinguished career in public and private service.

Established in 1993, the Engen Trophy is awarded for "... a record of lifetime achievement; or a single event; or a series of acts by an individual; a team; or by a corporation or organization that reaffirms the Wright Brothers' standard of excellence in aviation." Previous recipients include Herb Kelleher, the STS-114 Discovery Shuttle Crew, Scott Crossfield, the Tuskegee Airmen, Linda Hall Daschle, and the 2022 recipient Stephen Alterman. The permanent trophy resides in the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum.

"Carol Hallett is a force of nature and has served aviation for decades in government and industry positions with a unique combination of style, perseverance and persistence," said Aero Club President, Darby Becker. "The Aero Club of Washington is delighted to recognize her contributions!"

As the daughter of a U.S. Army pilot in WWI, aviation has been in Carol Hallett's blood since the day she was born. In 1959, Hallett saw a road-side sign advertising "\$1 Airplane Rides", and the very next day she went and bought the plane for herself, figuring she'll learn how to fly it later. At the time, there were very few pilots, let alone female pilots, but Hallett went on to earn her license and log over 5,000 flight hours. Her ability to fly opened doors for Hallett, especially as she pursued a political career in the California State Assembly, ultimately becoming California's first female Minority Leader. She credits her victory, a Republican in a heavily Democrat district, to her ability to fly from campaign stop to campaign stop, surprising voters because she stood out with her plane. After winning the election, Hallett's plane became an invaluable tool, allowing her to cross the expansive 300+ miles of CA-29 in no time. Local news affectionately dubbed her the *Flying Assemblywoman*, and she leveraged that moniker in her legislative agenda to enhance aviation safety, airport security, build laws to combat local aerial drug trafficking, and reform noise ordinance rules in the state's policy agenda.

After making a name for herself in California politics as the *Flying Assemblywoman*, Hallett caught the eye of soon-to-be President, Ronald Reagan. With her knowledge of aviation and drug trafficking from her time in California, in 1986 she was President Reagan's choice for Ambassador to the Bahamas. It was here that she developed the first effective drug interdiction program in the region, an effort that benefited greatly from her background in aviation. At the time, the Bahamas was the leading source of illicit narcotics into the United States, and U.S. Customs tracked dozens of cartel planes each month flying drugs in and out of the country. Hallett partnered with Customs and the FAA to implement new air traffic procedures to better intercept and prevent these drug planes from flying so brazenly in and out of the country. Her actions to intercede the drug traffickers' use of planes at one point led to a bounty for her assassination, and required elevated security. In a bold response, Hallett asked Customs if she could keep one of the seized drug planes for her personal and official use, and they said yes. The *Flying Assemblywoman* was now flying a former cartel plane around the 700+ islands of the Bahamas, no doubt a slap in the face to cartel leaders. By the end of her

appointment, the Bahamas was no longer the top trafficker of drugs into the U.S. - once again proving that Hallett could affect change by leveraging her ability to fly.

Following her success combatting the air-based trafficking of drugs into the U.S., President George H.W. Bush tapped Hallett for Commissioner of the U.S. Customs Service (a precursor to today's Customs and Border Patrol and Transportation Security Administration). In this role she oversaw a massive operation responsible for processing 1.3 million airline passengers per day and trillions of dollars of merchandise annually. Hallett's leadership led to significant improvements in investigation and enforcement operations, particularly in reforming aerial cargo screening, narcotics interception, first ever aerial surveillance of the southern border, and money laundering.

In 1995, following her successful tenure as Commissioner of Customs Enforcement, Hallett was selected to become the first female President and CEO of the Air Transport Association (ATA), now renamed Airlines for America (A4A). Overnight, Hallett became the top lobbyist in the U.S. for commercial aviation, and was oftentimes the only woman in the room fighting for industry reform that promoted growth and enhanced safety during her 8-year tenure.

Hallett's biggest impact on the aviation industry may have come in the hours, months, and years following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. On that morning, Hallett was in a Senator's office lobbying on behalf of the airline industry when she received word from her staff that the White House was trying to reach her. In a time before modern internet, Hallett, representing the entire airline industry, was the fastest and only way to immediately connect all of the airline CEOs across the nation. In that moment, she became one of the most influential people in the U.S. for ensuring the protection of the airline industry, and served as the liaison between the White House, intelligence agencies, and airlines.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks had a profound impact on air travel demand and created significant financial challenges for the airlines. The airline industry needed a single figure to unite around and turn to for leadership, and that person was Hallett. In response to these challenges, ATA actively collaborated with industry stakeholders and worked closely with the U.S. government to navigate the crisis and ensure the industry's survival. In addition to financial support, Hallett worked closely with heads of government agencies, including the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and Transportation Security Administration (TSA), to address security concerns and enhance airline safety. Under Hallett's leadership, ATA was able to play a vital role in helping the U.S. airline industry tackle a recovery, financial instability, security measures, and new regulatory frameworks that support the long-term success of aviation for generations to come.

After retiring from ATA in 2003, Hallett has remained active in the industry, serving on the board of directors for aviation companies such as Rolls-Royce, Atlas Air Worldwide, and All Nippon Airways. She also served on the CIA Director's National Security Advisory Panel for aviation policy and the Transnational Threats Task Force at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Hallett has continued to lobby for the protection and growth of the aviation industry while serving Of Counsel at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, spearheading the Chamber's Annual Aviation Summit, which she founded over 20 years ago. The conference continues to serve as one of the largest gatherings of aviation CEOs in the U.S. each year.

The Aero Club of Washington will present the Engen Trophy to Ambassador Hallett at the organization's November 14, 2023 luncheon at the Capital Hilton in Washington, DC. For more information, please visit [www.aeroclub.org](http://www.aeroclub.org).

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### **Background on the Aero Club of Washington**

*As an industry cornerstone, the Aero Club of Washington is dedicated to providing a forum for discussion of aviation and aerospace issues and achievements. Hosting hundreds of national and international aerospace leaders at its monthly luncheon meetings over the years, the Aero Club has fostered and promoted interest in the principles and development of aeronautics since 1909.*