

## May 8, 2009 - We Shouldn't Be Ashamed of Our Airport

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We shouldn't be ashamed of our airport

BY GEORGE FATTMAN

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I can't imagine anyone here wanting Johnstown to have less than the best airport money can buy. And let's face it, a good airport takes money, mostly public funding.

Ever since a fatal commuter crash in 1974, a former publisher of this newspaper, who lost three family members in the crash, and Rep. Jack Murtha and many others have worked diligently to make our airport as reliable as humanly possible.

What do The Washington Post and CNN and Entertainment Tonight care whether we have an airport that is not only safe but also an incentive to much-needed industrial development?

If they want to write about an underutilized airport, they need look no farther than Pittsburgh International. It is one of the finest airports in the world — at great public cost — but it has only 75 arrivals and departures a day.

Pittsburgh travelers find it so inconvenient to fly to Washington that they drive instead, and they can't fly to Harrisburg at all, according to the Post-Gazette.

How can anybody here criticize Murtha for doing everything within his considerable power to develop our airport?

Before he persuaded Congress to authorize an air-traffic control tower, our "control" came from a building at the Blair County Airport.

If you are old enough, you remember the days when Allegheny Airlines' only on-ground employee would sign in passengers, stack their luggage then dash out to the tarmac and peer into the sky and advise the pilot whether it looked safe to land.

Surely we deserve better than today's equivalent of that.

And we have it because the federal government agreed to make our airport a military center and a back-up to defense facilities at larger airports.

What do we care what outsiders think of that? They would care if they had to fly in and out of Johnstown.

Certainly we are not above making mistakes, nor is our congressman. (People who never do anything don't make mistakes.) But there is no reason to hang our heads because we want decent transportation connecting our community to the rest of the world, and our leaders are willing to work to get it.

Let's stop complaining and apologizing about Johnstown and start standing up for Johnstown.  
If we don't "lift Johnstown," as the new slogan goes, who will?

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