



Written by [Kurt Hyde](#) on October 29, 2009

## Govt Rule May Be Partly to Blame for NW Pilots Overshooting Minneapolis

The pilots of Northwest Flight 188 claim that they were overly concentrating on their schedules on their laptop computers when they overshot the Minneapolis airport by 150 miles. A number of aviation experts contend that the pilots actually fell asleep. Regardless of which explanation is correct, the one topic missing from the public debate is: "Why didn't the flight attendants awaken the pilots or otherwise alert them in a timely manner?"



The reason for this may be caused by an unconstitutional [directive](#) issued by Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta in 2001. In the aftermath of 9/11, the Transportation Secretary ordered the airlines to strengthen their cockpit doors. That is why airliners now have doors that, once locked, can't be opened by flight attendants. This directive was issued despite a lack of evidence that the 9/11 hijackers used physical force to gain entry to the cockpits. Rather than using physical force, it appears they cajoled their way into the cockpits using red boxes, which they claimed contained explosives.

The only known use of physical force to attempt entry to an airliner cockpit on September 11, 2001 was when the passengers of United Flight 93 heroically, but unsuccessfully, tried to take back the airliner. Based on this evidence, it would hardly seem logical to force the use of reinforced cockpit doors as the only people who would have been stopped by reinforced cockpit doors on 9/11 were the good guys on United Flight 93.

Yahoo News reported that a number of aviation experts have been suggesting it was more plausible that the pilots had fallen asleep during the San Diego to Minneapolis flight. These opinions come from knowledgeable people and should not be ignored. While not all airline pilots are men and not all flight attendants are women, that does describe the vast majority of both. There's nothing like an occasional visit from a female to keep men awake and alert. All that was needed in this case was for one of the of the flight attendants to have opened the cockpit door, tap one of the pilots on the shoulder, and suggest it was time to start the descent checklist. This whole event would have been a non-event. Unfortunately, the federally mandated, reinforced cockpit door precluded that from happening. (Attempts to reach the pilots via electronic communications were unsuccessful. As [NYDailyNews.com reported](#): "air traffic



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controllers, other pilots and also a flight attendant on an intercom all tried to get the pilots' attention, raising questions over whether they fell asleep at the controls.")

What is needed is a re-examination of the federal directive ordering reinforced cockpit doors on airliners. The directive should be evaluated on constitutional grounds, whether it would have deterred or actually helped the 9/11 hijackers, and the way reinforced cockpit doors isolate the pilots from other crew members during flights, which, when added to other sources of fatigue, can increase drowsiness on the part of pilots.

**Kurt Hyde** is a private pilot, a retired Air Force Navigator, and a veteran of many long-haul cargo flights who has had firsthand experience with fatigue and time-zone changes.

*Photo: AP Images*



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