

Inauguration of Langhorne Bond as ILA President

Ladies and gentlemen.

At every one of these annual meetings, it seems to me a theme emerges. It's usually something pretty obvious, that we hadn't noticed until someone more perceptive articulates it. This week, I suggest the following is the theme: that the initial phase of the engineering is over, eLoran has emerged and its effectiveness has been proved. And that from now on, we as an organisation and a community must move into the political area. The objectives are clear: to bring eLoran from concept plus demonstration to reality. To see it installed and operated in Europe and Asia, oh yes, and in the US, too. This will require additional skills to those this organisation has exercised over the last two or three years, a special kind of political savvy and subtlety. It is especially timely therefore that an excellent President, whose background has been running an engineering company – although he himself, curiously, is a biologist – is to be replaced by a new President, whose skills and talents lie in the political field.

I have to say, that it is only under these exceptional circumstances, this unique alignment of the planets, that you would persuade an engineer like me to speak in praise of, for heaven's sake, a lawyer. Normally, the only good thing you can say about lawyers is that at least they aren't accountants. But this lawyer followed a fine Washington tradition and at an early age went to the bar and entered politics, or at least the administration branch of government, which I'm told is quite different, although I'm sceptical.

He comes from a distinguished family. The Langhorne sisters were famous a century ago as high-born, and immensely wealthy young women from Virginia who crossed the Atlantic and married into the British aristocracy. Since our aristocracy have fine titles but no money, this was a mutually satisfactory arrangement. One sister married Waldorf Astor, becoming Lady Astor. She subsequently entered the British House of Commons as the first woman member to take her seat. She went on to become a revered figure in her constituency of Plymouth during the Blitz of the Second World War where she stood with the poor and those made homeless. They were, and are, political creatures these Langhornes, including the Bond branch of the family.

Which brings us to our Langhorne. Having worked for the Urban Mass Transit Administration, an organisation that featured long ago in my own career as a pioneer of automatic vehicle location, he moved to run the transportation of the Great State of Illinois. This state contains the even greater city of Chicago, the politics of which at the time this young man was posted there were run by the Democratic machine of Mayor Daley, a man who would make Saddam Hussain look like Father Christmas. Thereafter, becoming Administrator of the FAA and taking on the massed ranks of the air traffic controllers of PATCO must have seemed like a holiday. Nevertheless, he is one of the best-remembered administrators. Indeed, his own daughter told me that when she became a commercial pilot they pointed out to her his picture on the wall – not knowing that she was his daughter – and warned her that if she didn't behave herself, that bogeyman there would surely get her.

That bogeyman was, of course, Langhorne Bond, lawyer, administrator, pilot, politician, polymath, doughty fighter for causes in which he believes which, happily for us include Loran, a man willing quietly to dig into his own pocket, to put his money where his mouth is and give generously of his own time in support of causes he believes are right. That man is your new President, the Honourable Langhorne Bond.