

Attendant in tiff to be evaluated

By Colleen Long
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

NEW YORK — The flight attendant accused of onboard antics that captured the nation's attention when he told off a passenger and slid down the plane's emergency chute with a beer will undergo a mental health evaluation with the aim of avoiding jail time in a possible plea deal.

Steven Slater, dressed in a trim blue suit, appeared in a Queens courtroom for a brief hearing on charges of criminal mischief, reckless endangerment and trespassing after last month's meltdown aboard a JetBlue Airways Corp. flight from Pittsburgh that had just landed at Kennedy International Airport.

He was working Aug. 9 when, he said, an argument took place with a rude passenger. After landing at JFK, he went on the public address system, swore at a passenger who he claimed had treated him rudely, grabbed a beer and exited via an emergency chute, prosecutors said.

Attorneys on both sides said a deal was being discussed. Slater will be evaluated and may qualify for an alternative sentencing program, which means he could face community service and counseling instead of jail.

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown said Slater's willingness to be evaluated



Mary Altaffer/Associated Press

Former JetBlue flight attendant Steven Slater, center, arrives at Queens criminal court for a hearing Tuesday.

shows he's taking the charges more seriously than he had in the past.

Slater had spoken out after the incident, as his public opinion swelled and hundreds of thousands of fans online cheered him for standing up to the inhospitable world of airline travel.

The district attorney, speaking to reporters after the hearing, said it would behoove the public to take the Aug. 9 incident more seriously, noting the slide cost \$25,000 to repair and the plane had to be taken out of service afterward, causing passenger delays.

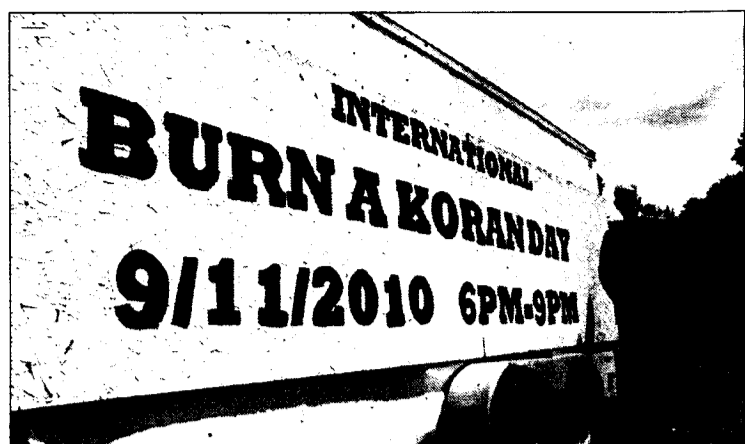
"It's no laughing matter," he said.

Slater's attorney, Daniel J. Horwitz, said his client was taking the matter very seriously and said he had been under tremendous pressure because of his terminally ill mother, recently deceased father, and health problems of his own, adding that his client is HIV positive. He said he was hoping prosecutors would take into account Slater's "long-standing and well-regarded reputation in the industry."

Horwitz said he hopes they can come to an agreement that favorably resolves the case, but he wouldn't specify what he was looking for. Brown said if Slater is admitted for alternative sentencing, he could undergo a treatment program lasting weeks, but he said it depended on the outcome of the evaluation and he's not ruling out the possibility of jail time yet.

Slater, his head held high, left the court without speaking to the swell of reporters surrounding him. His publicist and attorney said he's in good spirits and has spent the past few weeks in California with his ailing mother.

Slater resigned from JetBlue last week after about three years there; JetBlue said only that he was no longer an employee. Slater has spent nearly 20 years in the airline industry, but it's not clear what he's going to do now.



John Raoux/Associated Press

Rev. Terry Jones, of Gainesville, Fla., has vowed to continue his plan of burning copies of the Quran to protest the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Church to go ahead with Quran burning

By Mitch Stacy
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — A Christian minister vowed Tuesday to go ahead with plans to burn copies of the Quran to protest the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks despite warnings from the White House and the top U.S. general in Afghanistan that he would endanger American troops overseas.

Pastor Terry Jones of the Dove World Outreach Center, which has about 50 members, said he understands the government's concerns but plans to go forward with the burning Saturday to mark the ninth anniversary of the attacks.

He left the door open to change his mind, saying he is still praying about his decision, which was condemned Tuesday by an interfaith coalition that met in Washington to respond to a spike in anti-Muslim bigotry.

Gen. David Petraeus warned in an e-mail to The Associated Press that "images of the burning of a Quran would undoubtedly be used by extremists in Afghanistan and around the world to inflame public opinion and incite violence."

State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley echoed that, calling the plan to burn copies of the Quran "un-American" and saying it does not represent the views of most people in the U.S.

"While it may well be within someone's rights to take this action, we hope cooler heads will prevail," Crowley said.

Jones told the AP in a phone interview that he is also concerned but wonders how many

times the U.S. can back down.

"We think it's time to turn the tables, and instead of possibly blaming us for what could happen, we put the blame where it belongs - on the people who would do it," he said. "And maybe instead of addressing us, we should address radical Islam and send a very clear warning that they are not to retaliate in any form."

Jones, who runs the small, evangelical Christian church with an anti-Islam philosophy, says he has received more than 100 death threats and has started wearing a .40-caliber pistol strapped to his hip.

The threats started not long after the 58-year-old minister proclaimed in July that he would stage "International Burn a Quran Day." Supporters have been mailing copies of the Islamic holy text to his Dove World Outreach Center to be incinerated in a bonfire that evening.

The fire department has denied Jones a required burn permit for Saturday, but he says he is going ahead with his event. He said lawyers have told him his right to burn the Quran is protected by the First Amendment whether he's got permission from the city or not.

Muslims consider the Quran to be the word of God and insist it be treated with the utmost respect, along with any printed material containing its verses or the name of Allah or the Prophet Muhammad.

Any intentional damage or show of disrespect to the Quran is deeply offensive.

Colo. fire forces residents to flee

By Dan Elliott
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

BOULDER, Colo. — David Myers knew it was time to leave when he looked out into the forest and spotted bright red flames towering skyward. Then came a blinding cloud of smoke and a deafening roar as the fire ripped through the wilderness.

"You can hear just this consumption of fuel, just crackling and burning. And the hardest thing is ... you couldn't see it because at the point the smoke was that thick," he said.

Myers was among about 3,500 people who desperately fled the fire after it erupted in a tinder-dry canyon northwest of Boulder on Monday and swallowed up dozens of homes. Residents packed everything they could

into their cars and sped down narrow, winding roads to safety, encountering a vicious firestorm that melted the bumper of one couple's van.

Gov. Bill Ritter declared a state of emergency Tuesday as officials nearly doubled the fire's estimated size to more than 7,100 acres, or 11 square miles. At one point the plume from the fire could be seen in Wyoming, 90 miles to the north.

Authorities investigated reports that the fire started when a car crashed into a propane tank. They are also trying to figure out why an automated phone alert system failed for two hours during the evacuation, forcing authorities to go door-to-door to search for people in harm's way.

The fire caused no known injuries as residents appeared to

get out of the area in time. But many spent Tuesday in shelters wondering if their homes still existed. Boulder County Sheriff Joe Pelle said nine volunteer firefighters were among those who lost their homes.

Winds pushed the fire through three canyons where disease, drought and beetles that burrow under the bark have killed pine trees.

The so-called bark beetles have killed more than 3.5 million acres of trees in Colorado and southeastern Wyoming and pose a significant wildfire threat.

Gusty winds hampered firefighting Monday.

A squadron of firefighting planes was grounded much of the day Tuesday because smoke covered the canyonlands and obscured targets.

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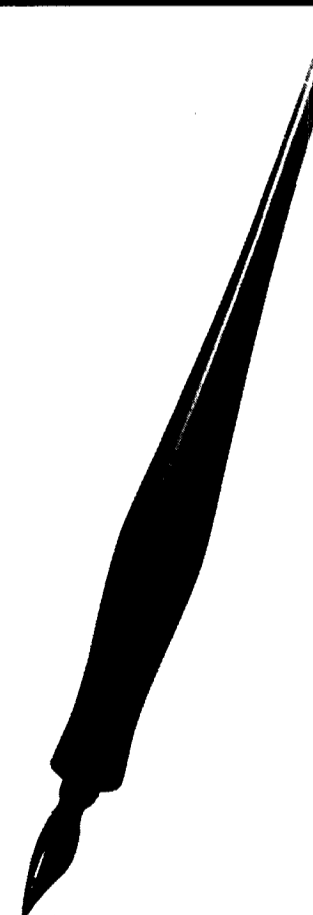
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