

Mr. OBERSTAR. Shouldn't something have gone off and said maybe we ought to take a look at the system? Since we are operating on a system—ATOS—maybe something else amiss?

What I am getting at is that there is an over-reliance on ATOS, and that if it is so successful, why is it that old-fashioned inspector feet on the ground, on shop floors, and engine rooms, are finding airworthiness directive compliance issues affected hundreds of aircraft? In other words, you need more people, you need more inspectors, need more hands-on work, and I want you to think hard about this, notwithstanding directives from Office of Management and Budget—we have gone through this with other FAA leadership in years past and other Administrations—work with us to develop an inspector workforce need list that we can realistically deliver on. Will you do that?

Mr. SABATINI. You have my commitment, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Thank you.

Now, the customer service initiative, what do you think about, what was your reaction? What was your gut reaction when you heard the statement in the earlier testimony from the whistleblower panel, the customer, Southwest, called the FAA and complained about the service they were getting from Mr. Boutris to get him removed? What was your reaction to that?

Mr. SABATINI. Unacceptable. That is simply an abuse of what our customer service initiative was intended to be. It was a mechanism to allow citizens of the United States who contact the FAA to express whatever concerns they may have, not to be used as a vehicle to accommodate a like or dislike about a particular inspector.

I will say time and time again, we are responsible for enforcement. Voluntary programs do not mean that we have abandoned enforcement. We will continue to enforce the regulations. Our mission is to gain full compliance and to operate at the highest levels of safety. You have my commitment, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Then I hope I have your commitment also to revisit this customer service initiative and re-aim it and redirect it, and thereby redirect back to its original purpose the mission, the safety mission of FAA.

Mr. SABATINI. You have my commitment, Mr. Chairman. I am planning to do that.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Thank you. That may be the most significant thing accomplished today.

Are there others who have questions? Mr. Costello?

Mr. COSTELLO. Mr. Chairman, I really do not have any other questions, but I would like to make a comment and express a concern, and that is Mr. Sabatini has been before our Subcommittee many times, and we have talked about safety and other issues. You know, frankly, my concern is this: that you have pointed out, and rightly so, that 99 percent of the planes that have been recently inspected are in full compliance. Frankly, I think that the Agency continues to rely on the fact that we have the safest system, aviation system, in the world. I know you are proud of the fact that 99 percent are in full compliance, but again I go back to my comments in my opening statement, and that is—and I don't think that you would disagree with me, and if you do I want to hear it, but there is no question when it came to runway safety that the FAA

took their eye off the ball. At one time in 2000, 2001, very serious about it, brought together all the stakeholders, and then when the numbers started going down the FAA went and directed their attention to other things.

The same thing with the hazardous conditions in the powers and facilities. Nothing was done until the Subcommittee took action. Even though employees were reporting mold and other hazardous conditions in these facilities to the FAA, there was no action taken until the Subcommittee scheduled a hearing, and then we started getting calls that said hey, finally the FAA is reacting, and it is because you are holding a hearing on this matter.

The list goes on and on with congestion and delays. I went through the whole list earlier.

So my concern, frankly, Mr. Sabatini, is that 99 percent compliance, what are people concerned about. We are concerned about the one that is not in compliance, and we have a responsibility and you have a responsibility to make certain that we get as close to 100 percent compliance as we can.

The FAA here—and you have acknowledged it—has failed, and we hope that you will produce a plan that will prevent from this ever happening again.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Thank you.

Mr. Sabatini, do you wish to respond?

Mr. SABATINI. I want to assure everyone here that the only reason why I mentioned 99 percent is to just demonstrate what we found in both cases. But I can tell you this: what I am paranoid about is the 1 percent, and we do not rest on our laurels. We strive every day to look at what is that remaining risk, and that is the challenge of the future.

We no longer see common cause accidents. That is because of the hard work that has been done over the years by many, many safety professionals in FAA and in the industry across the board. The challenge is: what are those risks out there and how do we learn about those risks? That is what we work hard every day to understand, and that is why it is so critically important to have a professional working relationship with industry so that together we can identify and resolve the remaining risk.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. DeFazio?

Mr. DEFAZIO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Sabatini, I would like to know, you mentioned this process is for citizens, the customer service initiative. What are the aggregate numbers? Who has used the system and who are they? Do you have those numbers, like how many are airlines, operators, how many are repair stations, how many are individual airmen? Do you have those numbers?

Mr. SABATINI. I can get you those numbers.

Mr. DEFAZIO. But has this process been used a lot? Have a lot of resources been devoted to resolving problems through this customer service initiative?

Mr. SABATINI. I would say it certainly requires resources, but it is not a drain on the system.