

safety excellence. We have safely operated more than 16 million flights over 37 years serving more than 1.2 billion customers. I think that easily makes us the safest airline in the world, and a record that anyone would justifiably be proud. I believe deeply that we have the best maintenance and engineering employees in the airline industry.

But I do want to assure this Committee and the American people that we will not rest on our safety record, no matter how good it may be. And I do commit to you that we will constructively and aggressively address the issues raised by the FAA and this Committee. Because we want to enable our proud, safe airline to continue as the safest in the world.

Our record makes credible this aspiration, our Southwest people will accept nothing less and our customers deserve nothing less.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Thank you.

Do your colleagues have statements as well? I am sorry, you are the FAA inspectors. I am sorry. I was distracted for a moment. Mr. Bassler?

Mr. BASSLER. Yes, sir, I do have a statement here I would like to give to the panel.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Pardon me?

Mr. BASSLER. I do have some testimony I would give.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Yes, you are next.

Mr. BASSLER. My name is John Bassler. I came to Southwest CMO from the Continental CMO, which I spent eight and a half years down there, back in June of 2005, as the assistant principal avionics inspector, under the supervisory principal avionics inspector, Mr. Colin, up until December 2007, when I requested to be moved to a different office.

When I arrived at the Southwest Airlines CMO in 2005, one of the first things I noticed was how fractured the Airworthiness group was. I came from the Continental CMO in Houston where that Airworthiness unit had scheduled meetings, including both specialties, avionics and maintenance, on a regular basis. The Southwest Airlines CMO did not, and as a matter of fact, it did not start having meetings of this nature until the latter part of 2007. I found the Airworthiness unit, in my opinion, to be dysfunctional.

I had not been in the office for very long when I witnessed my immediate supervisor, the principal avionics inspector, giving the middle finger gesture to the principal maintenance inspector when his back was turned. I thought that very unprofessional and I voiced my objections to my supervisor and I told him that I did not appreciate that in my presence.

Things progressively got worse in the office. Most of the friction was within the management ranks. During this time it must be noted that the inspectors continued to operate at an exceptional level, even without management support.

Around early March 2007, rumors began to fly that inspector Mr. Boutris had a couple of hot line complaints filed on him from outside the agency. This is when things really started to become hostile in the office. Mr. Boutris began to spend a lot of time conversing directly to Mr. Robert Naccache, the assistant manager, and Mr. Michael Mills, the office manager, behind closed doors,

several times a day. Mr. Boutris also began spending a lot of time with the data evaluation program manager, Mr. Doug Peters.

I started to recognize what appeared to me to be the obvious dislike Mr. Peters, Mr. Boutris, Mr. Mills and Mr. Naccache had toward the PMI. This dislike, in my opinion, seemed to be of a very personal nature toward this man. One day Mr. Peters was overheard by several inspectors, including myself, making a comment from Boutris' cubicle, the gloves are coming off.

Mr. Boutris was removed from his duties and work program, to my understanding, pending the outcome of the investigation and the complaints made against him. He was to have no contact in any capacity with the air carrier or its programs. This is evidently right around the time frame with Southwest Airlines contacted the PMI disclosing the possible over-fly of an Airworthiness directive of some of their aircraft. Being of avionic specialty, I was not privy to this information and therefore had no knowledge of the details or specifics of this disclosure.

Around the April 2007 time frame, the PMI was looking for volunteers to help complete the job assignments that were assigned to Mr. Boutris but that were not completed. Mr. Gawadzinski was having difficulty getting anyone to volunteer. He approached me and asked if I would be willing to work the SAI on ADs 1.3.6, on the airworthiness directives. And I told him I would be willing to do the assignment.

Had I known at the time Mr. Boutris' intentions, I would have never volunteered myself for this assignment. It wasn't a couple of days later I witnessed Mr. Boutris entering my cubicle and removing data from the SAI folder I had just acquired from him. Mr. Boutris never started the SAI. He had a couple of notes on a decision collection tool, but that was it. I had to start the inspection completely from scratch.

I began to become aware of the militant attitudes that were developing in the office from the individuals I have identified in the aforementioned paragraph. I became concerned that I was going to be targeted by these inspectors due to my agreeing to perform the SAI. I sent an e-mail to my supervisor, requesting that I be removed from the SAI because of the hostile environment developing in the office. My supervisor refused to remove me from the SAI. I then requested to at least add some inspectors to the inspection so that it would be a team event and I would not be individually targeted. My supervisor agreed and added one inspector, Mr. Collamore.

During this inspection, Mr. Boutris felt it important enough to approach Mr. Collamore and notify him that the SAI was being watched very closely. Mr. Collamore stated to me that he felt very threatened by Boutris' comment. I also learned of events that had transpired between Mr. Boutris and certain Southwest Airlines employees, which I was told was almost developed into a fistfight.

Mr. Collamore and I finished the inspection during this month of June 2007. There was a lengthy delay in completing the SAI due to Mr. Kervanik, who manages the Airworthiness Directives portion of Southwest Airlines' maintenance program, being on leave due to a medical situation within his immediate family. The final product was sent to the DEPM, Mr. Peters, for review. It was re-

turned with numerous, two full pages of comments. This upset me because in my ten years at the time experience with ATOS, I had never seen so many comments from a DEPM. I had performed inspections in the past and never had anything like this returned from the DEPM in this fashion before these events. This upset me deeply and I brought my concerns to my supervisor. I explained that I felt, again, I was being targeted and that the DEPM was using his position to personally attack my credibility.

Nothing was done about my concerns. I made a couple of spelling corrections to the verbiage and again forwarded it to the DEPM for review. This time, it was satisfactorily entered into the ATOS master record repository.

Several days later, the PAI wanted changes made again to the SAI, no comments, and had me request it being sent back from the repository. This is very unusual. Once an inspection has been saved to the data base, it never gets returned unless it is unusual circumstances. I have never witnessed it in my ten years of working in the ATOS. Phone calls are made and the SAI is returned. At this particular time, management personnel are attending a seminar out of State. So the only permanent management official still in the office was the assistant manager, Mr. Naccache.

The SAI sits in the DEPM's possession for approximately 15 days. When management finally returns to the office, I send an e-mail to the office manager, who now is Mr. Hedlund, and I ask him the status of the SAI. He responds to me to let me know the DEPM is waiting for PMI feedback. As a note, this is the third PMI, second actor so far. I thought this peculiar, since this individual had no information and was not present during the time the SAI was being performed.

A meeting is held at the request of the DEPM to discuss his concerns with the SAI with the PMI and the PAI. I was not invited to the meeting, nor was Larry. I was the team coordinator for this SAI. This upset me, because I was the team coordinator. I felt my knowledge was instrumental in this conversation. I voiced this concern to my supervisor. Nothing was done about my concerns.

After the meeting, the PAI sent an e-mail to the SAI team member, Larry Collamore, requesting the "yes" comments in the control section of the SAI. At this time, ATOS 1.1 was the national policy, and it did not require "yes" comments. Mr. Collamore responded to the e-mail by respectfully refusing to add the "yes" comments. His response also identified the inappropriate behavior being displayed by certain inspectors in the office.

Management meets in the manager's office to discuss the SAI. The next morning, the SAI work instructions are changed to require "yes" comments. This action was contrary to ATOS and AFS 900 policy. A meeting is held to discuss the SAI. The meeting included the PAI, Mr. Colin, the temporary PMI, Mr. Hoover, the temporary POI, Mr. Nelson, the manager, Bobby Hedlund, the DEPM, Mr. Peters, myself and Larry.

Larry and I voiced our frustration with the entire process and the way this inspection is being handled. Both Larry and I felt we were being targeted and that we were not getting fair and equitable treatment. Our concerns went unaddressed again. By the time the SAI was saved to the ATOS repository, it sat in the

DEPM's review for 20 days. This again is contrary to ATOS data quality guidelines and the required disciplinary action on the DEPM was not taken.

At this point, I was fed up with the office environment and how I was being unfairly treated by management and certain inspectors. I requested to be transferred to another office in the local area. I was finally told by the manager, Mr. Hedlund, that I received a transfer to the DFW FSDO. This meeting took place in my cubicle. During the conversation, my supervisor walked up, walked by and made some comments, then flipped me off with both fingers from both his hands, in front of the manager.

I sent a grievance to the region and I requested immediate removal from the office. The SAI letter addressing the findings during the SAI 1.3.6 still had not left the office. I do not know what the final letter looked like, since I was no longer employed in the office. I also cannot take ownership of the final SAI, since I believe the data has been manipulated since my departure.

I made every attempt to complete this assignment in the most professional manner humanly possible. I followed national policies and guidance through the entire process. I pride myself as a public servant to make every attempt to make the safest transportation system in the world. I swore an oath to do just that.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Thank you, Mr. Bassler.

Mr. Collamore, do you have a separate statement?

Mr. COLLAMORE. No, sir, I don't.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Okay, thank you. Thank you very much for your testimony. I appreciate your candor and your forthrightness.

Mr. Kelleher and Mr. Kelly, Southwest Airlines is not on trial here. I want you to understand that. Your customer satisfaction rating is not on trial or in question. What is at stake in this hearing is the role of the FAA and the compliance with the Airworthiness Directives.

At the very outset of all this disclosure, there was a statement, initial public statement from Southwest Airlines, implying that it had received concurrence from Boeing that it was acceptable to continue flying the aircraft. Those were statements from Southwest reported in the news media, copies of which we have received. Is it Boeing's responsibility to give approval on Airworthiness Directive matters, or is that the FAA's responsibility?

Mr. KELLEHER. Mr. Chairman, I think there has been a mistake there with respect to what you read. We never asked the Boeing Company to deal with the subject of regulatory compliance. We simply asked the Boeing Company whether or not there were any safety of flight issues involved in flying those airplanes for the eight days that it took to re-inspect them. The Boeing statement itself specifically says, we are not addressing the issue of regulatory compliance.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Did they put that in writing to Southwest?

Mr. KELLEHER. I believe it is.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Would you submit that for the record, so we can have the record correct on that matter?

Mr. KELLEHER. Yes, sir, absolutely.

Mr. OBERSTAR. It certainly gave a very inappropriate impression to my investigative mind and my experience.