

Mr. PETRI. So you need to figure out ways, as an industry, as well as we, to make something like this work for the traveling public.

Mr. KELLY. We have found some opportunities here to put better checks and balances in place, to have more frequent audits, that would help mitigate the kind of thing that you are talking about. But in the end, I would still rather hear people disclose what problems are as opposed to have people incented to hide them.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Thank you, Mr. Petri. I appreciate your thoughts and you suggested some very important lines of further consideration.

Chairwoman Brown, the Chair of our Rail Subcommittee.

Ms. BROWN OF FLORIDA. Thank you. Mr. Kelleher and Mr. Kelly, I want to tell you that most Members of Congress, they think they are experts definitely with aviation, because we travel two, four times a week. As I told you, I am from Florida and I use your airline all the time. In fact, in my other life, I used to be a travel agent. So I understand all of the wonderful things, on time, the cost, the safety, the fact that you have carried over a billion people.

But this little incident, as you know, is a black eye on Southwest. I guess I have a couple of questions in that light. One of them is that your Washington representative said that neither you nor the management team had any knowledge of those violations until some of the stories started appearing in the press. Is this unusual? You know this has damaged the airlines. What have you done to make sure that this doesn't happen again?

Mr. KELLY. Well, it is unusual. We have never found ourselves in this situation before, quite honestly. To put this particular matter into context, the reason that the mistake was made in the first place was because Southwest Airlines was making investments and modifications to our aircraft to make them safer. So we were reducing areas that had to be inspected previously by installing new solid metal panels.

This one small area that Herb mentioned earlier was left off. Clearly, this experience has identified a change order control process that we want to improve upon. We don't find many errors, but I think what we have all heard all day is that we want to strive to be perfect. And I can guarantee you that we will strive to be perfect. I cannot guarantee you that we will be perfect. But we are always looking for opportunities to improve.

And it is a black eye. But my commitment to you is that we are going to take this constructively and we are going to better for that. We have implemented already a number of changes within our regulatory compliance function so that we will escalate these issues to the proper management level without question. And we will address the root cause to mitigate the number of errors.

Ms. BROWN OF FLORIDA. Mr. Kelleher, if there was a song coming up that I really liked, like, you have personality and the airline represents kind of your personality, and you have done a great job. But we just finished talking about, and I know you heard it, about this culture as far as customer as opposed to stakeholder and the relationship between you all and FAA. Can you talk about that a little bit? Because basically, it seems as if the relationship is too

close. Not that we want adversaries. But it is just the difference between me and Mr. Oberstar and me and Ms. Johnson.

Mr. KELLEHER. I think one of the things that the Committee has touched on here that is very, very meaningful, Congresswoman, and it is exactly what you said, from what I have now heard and from what I have found out, since this became an issue, there can be too much closeness between the regulator and the regulated. And we were very, Gary in particular, and Ron Ricks, were very disturbed to learn that this decision had been made without bringing it to the attention of even our vice president of maintenance. That will not happen again. I can assure you.

But there was some kind of temporary malfunction there for some reason. We certainly don't want a relationship that is too cozy with the FAA. Because of course, that doesn't in the longer run do the carrier any good. The carrier needs to have people at the FAA saying, hey, wait a second, you are not doing this right, you can do this better, you need to revise your records. That sort of thing, that advice, that counsel, that guidance, I think is very important to the carrier, coming the other way. And apparently, we were a little shy on getting that too.

Ms. BROWN OF FLORIDA. Thank you. I yield back the balance of my time. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Thank you. I now call on Chairwoman Johnson, Chair of our Water Resources Subcommittee.

Ms. JOHNSON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I am probably one of the few people on this Committee that has known Southwest Airlines ever since there has been a Southwest Airlines. What I am concerned about, Mr. Kelleher, is, do you feel at any time that the safety of the passengers was breached during this time?

Mr. KELLEHER. No, I do not, in any way, shape or form. Let me give you a comparison, if I might. And I am bearing in mind the Chairman's admonition earlier against creep. I do understand that.

But to put this in context, when you first come under the aging aircraft AD, right, you are just getting under it, the FAA gives you 4,500 cycles before you have to start inspecting. With our operations, that is about a year and a half before you have to start inspecting.

We flew these airplanes for about eight months. I think Inspector Boutris mentioned 30 months, but that is not so. It was June of 2006 to February of 2007. And so what I am saying is that the FAA doesn't regard that there is any threat to the airplane from cracks until you fly it for a year and a half. We flew it less than a year and a half.

Furthermore, as Gary Kelly said, we probably inspected that particular airplane and its fuselage 80 times during the year. Don't think that an airworthiness inspection directive is the only inspection that airlines apply to airplanes. We probably have four times as many regular inspections on our airplanes as the FAA requires. Those airplanes, it is like going to an internist twice a week for an examination with respect to the fuselage.

And there is another special AD inspection that comes within seven tenths of an inch of where we are talking about. So it would