

But without having the physical inspections that verify compliance, I think it leaves everyone wondering exactly where we are. I think until the FAA integrates that piece back into their process, it is going to be a flawed process. I don't care how much data you collect, if you don't know that the data is good, it is meaningless, it is absolutely useless, as you mentioned earlier, Mr. Chairman.

I think until the agency is forthcoming about that and faces that problem and deals with it, this is not going away. I will conclude on that and I look forward to any questions you might have.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Thank you for your candor.

Ms. Goodrich?

Ms. GOODRICH. I am going to turn this over to Rick Andrews.

Mr. ANDREWS. Chairman Oberstar, Members of this Committee, thank you for holding these hearings on the relationship between the FAA and the airlines. My name is Richard Andrews. I was employed as an aviation safety inspector by the FAA at the American Eagle Certificate Management Office in the Southwest Region and assigned as an aircrew program manager in the American Eagle unit until March 31st of this year.

I am a member of the Professional Aviation Safety Specialists and I served as the PASS representative for the American Eagle Airlines Operations Unit in that Certificate Management Office.

I have worked for the FAA over 31 years. During that time, I have witnessed dramatic changes in the aviation industry. When I first started my career with the FAA, safety of the system was the priority. With the financial hardships facing many of the airlines and the pay for performance mentality of FAA managers, safety has become a second thought.

My work at the Certificate Management Office has proven to me that management's primary goal is to fill the quotas for the office, in other words, producing members is the focus, rather than getting the job done right. As FAA inspectors, we are the workforce trained to focus only on the safety of the system. It is beyond frustrating when we discover a problem with an air carrier and are prevented from doing anything about it. We are frequently stopped in our tracks by several layers of management and our focus is on pleasing the airlines.

Thirty-one years ago, I was out in the field with my hands on airplanes and looking for safety problems. I had the power to make a difference. Now, in the age of self-disclosure and the tight relationships between FAA management and the airlines, inspectors are sitting at their desks getting their information into a computer. Unfortunately, what suffers most from all this is the safety of the system.

I have seen and experienced the repercussions of these cozy relationships between the FAA and airlines in the past. A recent situation illustrates the point. In October of 2007, I met with the American Eagle Unit assistant manager and principal operations inspector to discuss the status of American Eagle Airlines' flight operations and training. It was agreed that American Eagle should be under surveillance, and I was asked to start doing an in-depth evaluation of their manuals and programs. After several months of working on this project, in addition to my other full-time assign-

ments, I came up with numerous issues that placed regulatory compliance in question.

After completing my research, I drafted 11 letters detailing handbooks, compliance issues, procedural problems and training issues. The drafts were forwarded to the principal inspector so that he could put them into formal FAA letter format. The principal inspector forwarded those letters to the unit supervisor. And in November of 2007 and again in January of 2008, I asked the unit supervisor about the status of the letters in the presence of the principal inspector and the assistant unit manager. On both occasions, the unit supervisor, who I have been told used to work for American Eagle, responded that we cannot send all those letters to American Eagle, as it "will overwhelm them."

However, after details of this hearing were released, I was notified last week by the principal inspector that the unit supervisor has now told him, get those letters out of this office. It took over four months for anything to happen with these letters. I am confident that nothing would have happened if not for this hearing.

Due to the extended delay in sending out the letters, several of the compliance issues I discovered remain unaddressed or undocumented. I was forced to attempt to do work-arounds on many of the issues. This has not damaged my credibility with the air carrier, but it is not the best way to address situations so important to public safety.

As I previously stated, I retired at the end of last month. I would have worked longer, but I could not do so under the current conditions that prevail at the FAA. Inspectors in large offices are confined by all these get out of jail free programs, and FAA's management's refusal to hold airlines accountable.

Again, I thank the Committee for holding these hearings and investigating these serious issues. As an experienced FAA inspector, I believe nothing should ever be more important than the agency's safety mission. Thank you.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Thank you very much, Mr. Andrews. I greatly appreciate your testimony. It raises issues that I will come back to in a moment.

Mr. Thrash?

Mr. THRASH. I have heard Sam Rayburn's name only once today, so I would like to hear it again. I would like to thank the people from Tennessee for sending Sam Houston down to what we can now say is Texas, and that is where I came from, through Houston, via Lufkin, Houston, up here.

So they sent us both, Sam Rayburn and Sam Houston. So if there is any Tennessee people out there, I want to thank you very much. And I hope we can invoke their spirit in your hearts to have the strength to follow through on some of the facts of the matter that you have heard today.

I look around here and some of the people that I wanted to talk to are gone. That is Mr. Stuckey, Mr. Sabatini and Mr. Ballough. By the way, my name is Phil Thrash, and I have about 40 years operational aviation experience, military, part 121 Frontier Airlines. I was in the FAA unit that oversaw Continental Airlines for 20 years. My last 10 years I served as an FG-1825, that is an aviation safety inspector, air carrier operations. My job description was