

Mr. BRANTLEY. Yes, sir, I believe we are, if not in a worse state, we are at least back to where we were in 1996, 1997.

Mr. DEFAZIO. Do you think ATOS will protect us? Is that a substitute?

Mr. BRANTLEY. Again, when the data can't be verified, without physically checking that the maintenance is being accomplished and just taking the word of the carrier, I think that is a flawed process, and we will continue to see problems like what occurred with Southwest. Hopefully, they will be compliance issues and not accidents.

Mr. DEFAZIO. I think in the case of Southwest, they didn't try and phony up compliance, they didn't report that they had complied and get bad data in the computer, it was more complicated.

Mr. BRANTLEY. Yes, absolutely.

Mr. DEFAZIO. But there could be, and I think back to the good old days of Frank Lorenzo, imperious management that is basically telling people to phony up data.

Mr. BRANTLEY. Yes, sir. One of the keys that we have seen is, ATOS was set up to try to accomplish oversight with limited resources. But it has evolved over the last decade as not just a way to do that, but a way to further reduce resources, if possible. So one of the things we hear frequently from the FAA is, we are trying to find a way to get the work done without having the people.

And quite frankly, they have gone to a point where there is not enough of the people doing the work that they should to make sure that the data base that they're relying on, that this automated system is a tool rather than the ultimate authority. And right now it is the authority and it doesn't know what it is talking about.

Mr. DEFAZIO. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Chairwoman Johnson.

Ms. JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Brantley, would you describe your professional responsibilities?

Mr. BRANTLEY. Yes, ma'am. Actually, my professional responsibilities, as it relates to—are you referring to what I would do for the FAA? I come from a different workforce. I come from the systems specialists that repair and maintain the equipment that the FAA uses to control air traffic. So I am not an aviation safety inspector.

Ms. JOHNSON. And you work with a number of other specialists?

Mr. BRANTLEY. Yes, ma'am. Not today, but I have, yes. Today I work full-time for the union.

Ms. JOHNSON. Okay. Has there ever been any discussion of some of the relationships or some of the things that might be missed because of it in your group?

Mr. BRANTLEY. It is a little bit different, because there is not the outside interaction. What we tended to see more in the workforce I came from was managers or even employees going to work for a company right after leaving the FAA and sometimes not in the, let's say under questionable circumstances.

I can recall, there was a director of what was then airway facilities, six or eight years ago, that retired from the FAA, went to work for a company immediately after. And the way he got around, apparently, ethics rules was the last year, six to twelve of his

months of employment with the FAA, he just recused himself from being involved in any decisions that might be related to that company. That seemed like an ethics problem to me.

So I think there are loopholes that are found throughout the FAA. That is something that I have had a concern with for a while. But it is a very different issue than I think what you are looking at with the inspector workforce.

Ms. JOHNSON. Do you think it is widespread practice that the flight standard managers alter information entered into the FAA data base or anything to protect the airlines?

Mr. BRANTLEY. Ma'am, I think that is not just a bad idea, I think that is, if not criminal, it should be. I just think that if there is a difference of opinion, there should be a way to document that and get it to a place where a decision can be made.

But to give anyone the authority to just unilaterally override what has been found, and this is the findings of an investigation or an inspection, to just override that is I think extremely poor judgment by the agency.

Ms. JOHNSON. Do you think the ATOS is broken?

Mr. BRANTLEY. I need to qualify my answer, because I think there is a lot of things that could be fixed with ATOS and with the voluntary disclosure systems. I think there is value in both of them. But quite frankly, unless there is a change in leadership in the FAA, none of that will matter. Because the culture has to change. And that won't change because of changes in the programs. That has to come with changes in the people at the top. And that has to flow down.

Until that happens, I think anything else would be cosmetic, and it may keep things out of the newspapers for a period of time. But the problems will be there, they will remain.

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

Mr. OBERSTAR. Thank you for your questions, very pointed and right on target.

The gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. Carney.

Mr. CARNEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is for anybody who cares to jump in. I have asked this of prior panels earlier today, too. It is about, since the investigation broke in the press a couple of weeks ago, we have seen the FAA order the national audit. In the last couple of weeks, hundreds of aircraft have been grounded in six of the major airlines. Why is that happening now? Why shouldn't this have been occurring all along?

Mr. BRANTLEY. Well, sir, I think, if I might start, it is clear in my mind that there is fear that something is going to be found that they wouldn't want to be found. There is going to be an incentive for the airline to disclose that. One of the things that I didn't mention earlier that is also a part of this ongoing review that the FAA is doing, they are doing this jointly with the airlines. So it is not like just inspectors doing it, either. That way, if there is a problem found, it can very easily be voluntarily disclosed. Then it is non-punitive. And frankly, I think that gets to the heart of the problem again.

It feels to me like the FAA just doesn't get it, or maybe they're just arrogant enough to believe that they can do it anyway.

Mr. CARNEY. Anyone else?