Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

**Hearing on "Critical lapses in FAA Safety Oversight of Airlines: Abuses of
Regulatory Partnership Programs"
Thursday, April 3, 2008**

Statement – Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-04)

Thank you, Chairman Oberstar, for holding today's hearing to investigate the recent actions of Southwest Airlines and the Federal Aviation Administration, which resulted in at least 117 aircraft operating in direct violation of Federal Aviation Regulations. I would like to begin by thanking Mr. Charalambe "Bobby" Boutris and Mr. Douglas Peters – employees of Southwest Airlines - for courageously stepping forward and bringing these violations to the attention of this Committee. Their actions are commendable and may very well have saved hundreds of lives.

Upon hearing from Mr. Boutris and Mr. Peters, we launched a full investigation into the matter - an investigation which has uncovered a number of regulatory lapses resulting in aircraft operating despite the fact that they did not comply with Airworthiness Directives (AD). Of the 117 aircraft identified, 47 performed service without a fuselage crack check. The remaining 70 aircraft were out of compliance due to the fact that their rudder inspections had been expired for one year or more.

Aviation safety and adherence to Federal Aviation Regulation is of particular importance to me. My constituents remember all to well the 1994 crash of USAir flight 427 in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania. This tragic incident, which claimed the lives of 132 passengers, was caused by a rudder malfunction. Following this incident, the FAA implemented strict regulations regarding rudder inspections to ensure that future incidents do not occur. These are the very same rudder inspections, which Southwest Airlines failed to perform on at least 70 of its aircraft.

Chairman Oberstar, I would like to again thank you for holding this critically important hearing. I look forward to hearing from each of our witnesses today and working with you to ensure passengers will be safe when they travel.

###