



**Statement for the Record for Congressman Walz
Oversight and Investigations Hearing on “Critical Lapses in FAA Safety Oversight
of Airlines: Abuses of Regulatory ‘Partnership Programs’”**

I want to thank Chairman Oberstar and Ranking Member Mica for calling today’s hearing on “Critical Lapses in FAA Safety Oversight of Airlines: Abuses of Regulatory ‘Partnership Programs’”

We are here today to look into serious lapses in oversight that occurred with the FAA’s inspection of some Southwest Airlines planes. Those lapses are certainly troubling. But even more troubling is what it took for this information to come to light. We are only holding this hearing today because two FAA safety inspectors came forward to blow the whistle on wrongdoing. Without their brave action to come forward, it’s possible that these lapses would have gone unnoticed.

The mistakes that were made by employees at Southwest Airlines when they missed certain structural inspections on 46 older aircraft, and the failure of Southwest to ground those aircraft until the checks were completed pose an unacceptable risk to the safety of flying public. They reflect systemic shortcomings in our safety oversight program as a whole.

I understand that FAA officials had good intentions and sound reasoning for beginning a voluntary disclosure program that allows the airlines to report violations without fear of fines and sanctions. But we all must agree that the objective of voluntary disclosure is not to let the airlines off the hook.

A "culture of coziness" between the government regulatory agencies and the businesses they regulate is not what the American people expect from their government, and it certainly is not what they deserve. The flying public wants to be confident that their take-offs and landings will be as safe as possible. They deserve to know that the FAA will not let its cozy relations with the airlines blind them to glaring problems with aircraft maintenance.

I hope that today's hearing and the courageous testimonies of these two whistleblowers will help us to find new approaches and new way to improve the FAA's oversight system and to ensure that the American people can fly safely.