

It is very clear that the agency acts when they are pushed to act. You know, it is not enough to have safety regulations in place. We in this Committee, the Subcommittee on Aviation, and the American people expect the FAA to enforce these regulations.

As has been pointed out by the Chairman and others, we have the safest air transport system in the world here in the United States, but we can't become complacent and rely on the past.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, let me say that I have said it before and I will say it again, I have said it at Aviation Subcommittee hearings and I have said it over and over again, and I will say it again today: I want the FAA to know, I want the industry to know this Committee is not going away, the Aviation Subcommittee is not going away. We are going to fulfill our responsibilities of aggressive oversight on this issue and every issue. We owe it to the American people. That is our responsibility and we are going to live up to our responsibility.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today, and I thank you for calling this hearing.

Mr. OBERSTAR. I thank the gentleman for his comments and for his superb work as the Chair of the Aviation Subcommittee.

Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Aviation, distinguished gentleman from Wisconsin, Mr. Petri.

Mr. PETRI. I thank my Chairman from Minnesota. And I would like to thank you for having this important hearing on the FAA's airline maintenance oversight and how they have discharged that responsibility. I will summarize my remarks and ask that the full remarks be made a part of the record.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Without objection, it will be included in the record.

Mr. PETRI. The roughly 6,900 employees of the FAA's Office of Aviation Safety, including some 3,800 aviation safety inspectors, oversee approximately 19,000 aircraft, including about 7,000 aircraft that make up the U.S. commercial airline fleet; over 500,000 pilots and approximately 5,000 repair stations. Their charge is as important as it is obviously large.

While it is true that we are enjoying the safest period in aviation history, due in no small part to the hard work of many at the FAA and at the airlines, we must keep a vigilant guard to protect safety because lives, as has been pointed out, depend on it.

Clearly, there were serious problems at the FAA's Southwest Certificate Management Office. The dysfunctional make-up of the office got in the way of proper safety oversight, and we are fortunate that no lives were lost.

As we listen to today's witnesses, we need to pay special attention to proposed recommendations to prevent such a situation from happening again. Our emphasis today also should focus on the future of aviation safety, on the "how it happened" so that we can fix the problem, not just on "what happened."

To this end, I am interested in hearing the Inspector General's recommendations after having fully investigated the events that occurred at the FAA's Southwest Certificate Management Office, as well as recommendations from our other witnesses.

Fundamental to this Committee's responsibility to safety is to ensure that the FAA has the proper number of inspectors to carry out

the mission of the Office of Aviation Safety. The FAA's Aviation Safety Workforce Plan, released Monday, indicates that 14 percent of the engineers and up to 35 percent of its inspector corps will be eligible to retire in budget year 2009, compared to 4 percent that actually retired in budget year 2007.

This Committee's FAA reauthorization bill included language requiring the Administration to develop an aviation safety inspector staffing model to account for retirement trends and ensure adequate staffing. For this reason, along with many others, I urge our Senate counterparts to move forward on their bill so that we can address these important aviation safety issues.

I thank the Chairman again for calling this important hearing and yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. OBERSTAR. I concur in the gentleman's appeal to the other body and to Mr. Mica's vigilant efforts with the other body, as we have all done, and hope that we can come to a point where we have a conference with the Senate and move the FAA reauthorization act.

We will now move to our first panel, ask members to rise, raise your right hand. Do you solemnly swear that the testimony you will give before this Committee in the matters now under consideration will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

[Witnesses respond in the affirmative.]

Mr. OBERSTAR. You may be seated.

Mr. Boutris, we will begin with you, but, at the outset, I want to express my great appreciation to all of the members of this panel for the public-spirited courage it took when you ran the length of administrative procedures to call to account the failing practices and came to no avail, that you had the courage to step forward and come to our Committee and say something serious is amiss. And I regret that a death threat ensued in that process, but I am greatly relieved that it is under investigation by law enforcement authorities. You deserve the gratitude of the flying public and of the Members of this Committee.

Mr. Boutris.

TESTIMONY OF CHARALAMBE "BOBBY" BOUTRIS, AVIATION SAFETY INSPECTOR AND BOEING 737-700 PARTIAL PROGRAM MANAGER FOR AIRCRAFT MAINTENANCE, SOUTHWEST AIRLINES CERTIFICATE MANAGEMENT OFFICE; DOUGLAS E. PETERS, AVIATION SAFETY INSPECTOR AND BOEING 757 PARTIAL PROGRAM MANAGER, AMERICAN AIRLINES CERTIFICATION UNIT, AMR CMO; MICHAEL C. MILLS, ASSISTANT MANAGER, DALLAS FORT WORTH FLIGHT STANDARDS DISTRICT OFFICE; PAUL E. COTTI, SUPERVISOR, AMERICAN EAGLE AIRWORTHINESS UNIT, AMR CMO; ROBERT A. NACCACHE, RET. ASSISTANT MANAGER, SWA CMO; AND TERRY D. LAMBERT, MANAGER, SAFETY AND ANALYSIS GROUP, FLIGHT STANDARDS DIVISION, FAA SOUTHWEST REGION

Mr. BOUTRIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. My name is Charalambe Boutris. I go by Bobby for obvious reasons. I have a