

that occurred in April 2007 revealed several shortcomings regarding the lack of approval documentation for Southwest Airlines' maintenance program.

The flying public and Southwest Airlines deserves to hear the truthful facts surrounding the lack of oversight at this carrier. They also deserve to board a flight without having to worry if the FAA inspector responsible for the oversight of that carrier has allowed them to knowingly fly in an unsafe aircraft. They deserve to fly in a plane knowing that when known safety concerns are brought to FAA Divisional, Headquarter levels, that they are not ignored and pushed aside until the threat of subpoena has been made by Congress.

In conclusion, let me say that I feel it is my duty to see this matter through in hopes of the Committee assessing the information and making the determination of what needs to happen next. The unethical actions that have been identified and permitted, as well as the known unsafe conditions, have gone on for too long. The fact that FAA senior management knew about these issues within the Southwest CMO is undisputed.

I have received unsolicited encouragement from field inspectors all throughout the agency, with many of them revealing examples of the same types of mismanagement that we are discussing today. Not only for my sake, but for theirs, I feel empowered and compelled as a United States citizen, and having the privilege of being a Federal employee, to stand up for the rights of all aviation safety inspectors. I am thankful for the opportunity to come before you and explain the obstacles that we face on a daily basis, placed upon us oftentimes by our own agency that hinders us from our first and foremost duty: safety.

As for Southwest Airlines as a whole, it is my opinion that your company was led down the wrong path by a handful of individuals both within your ranks and ours. Unfortunately, these individuals have negatively impacted your company's reputation and put passengers and crew at risk. I am not sure how long it will take to recover from this, but I am sure that if any company can do it, Southwest Airlines can. You have a great company and your reputation will shine again.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Thank you, Mr. Peters

I think the American public should take great heart from the courage demonstrated by these two witnesses and, as we will see, from the others in this panel, but also from the depth of conviction with which they give their testimony. And I just want to say, parenthetically here, Mr. Peters' statement I do not have confidence that all responsible individuals will be held accountable, I make the observation that Mr. Gawadzinski, about whom you heard devastating testimony, is still an FAA inspector. He has been removed from the Southwest Certificate, transferred to the American Airlines Certificate as CMO at \$100,000 a year pay.

Mr. Mills.

Mr. MILLS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Mica, and honorable Members. My name is Michael Mills. I am currently Assistant Manager of the Dallas-Fort Worth Flight Standards District Office in Fort Worth, Texas. I have been employed with the FAA for al-

most 13 years, including 6 years in management. Prior to my employment with the FAA, I worked for 28 years as a commercial airline pilot, and much of that time was spent in airline operations management. I have accumulated more than 15,000 hours of accident-free flying, and in my employment with the FAA I have enjoyed a blemish-free employment record until May 8th, 2007, when I was abruptly removed from my position as Manager of the Southwest Airlines Certificate Management Office.

My removal occurred within a matter of days after I had discovered and reported to my superiors that Southwest Airlines had overflowed critical safety inspections of some of its aircraft and that one of my subordinates, the Principal Maintenance Inspector, Douglas Gawadzinski, had apparently suppressed this information.

Inspectors Boutris and Peters, along with one of my supervisors, Paul Cotti, all of whom are appearing with me today, were instrumental in discovering and analyzing the records that led to my initial reporting of these overflights to the regional level and my call for an investigation in early April 2007. I applaud their courage in exposing this episode, especially in light of the humiliating treatment that I have received as a result of my actions. These are honest, hard-working men, proud of what they do, and who attempted to work within the system to have their concerns addressed. They saw in me someone they could trust, and I decided to help them. My dismissal for doing so was a fate that certainly was not lost on them, so it is no surprise that they sought the whistleblower protection that was available.

Even considering the damage to my reputation at the hands of my superiors, I am still proud to be a part of this agency and its important mission.

The partnership concepts that are the subject of this inquiry have some use in the FAA toolbox, but this unfortunate episode bears stark evidence that the success of these partnerships is highly dependent upon the integrity of those persons engaged in the process and the propriety of their actions.

I was appointed Manager of the Southwest Airlines Certificate Management Office by Tom Stuckey, the Southwest Region Flight Standards Division Manager. After a few months on the job, it became clear to me that the oversight mission of the office towards Southwest Airlines was considerably degraded by virtue of the informality of its business and the coziness between some of the inspectors and their counterparts at Southwest Airlines.

I also found that the FAA Principal Maintenance Inspector, Douglas Gawadzinski, one of four supervisors who reported to me, appeared to be unusually lenient with the carrier in several areas, especially enforcing Federal aviation regulations. He had also accrued among the office staff a number of adherents to his philosophy of accommodation for the carrier.

He professed to have been enlightened to this approach through personal relationships he convincingly purported to have had at FAA Headquarters with Flight Standards Director James Ballough and Associate Administrator Nicholas Sabatini, whose names he frequently dropped, describing them as his mentors and the sources of this line of thought. As I was and still am a strong advocate of regulation enforcement, Gawadzinski considered me an impedi-

ment to his cause, and I became a source of great irritation and conflict for him.

My assessment that the CMO's oversight and enforcement posture had deteriorated led me to publish a memorandum entitled A Time for Change, setting forth my goal of refocusing the office toward a more business-like oversight model.

Mr. Chairman, I am running out of time. Would you like for me to continue?

Mr. OBERSTAR. If you could summarize the rest of your statement, please.

Mr. MILLS. Okay.

Counseling Gawadzinski had proved futile and my attempts to document his actions were met with a warning against doing so from my supervisor, Ron McGarry. This exemplified a pattern of protection of Gawadzinski from above my level. That I was unable to penetrate into the Southwest Airlines AD overflight occurred in March 2007.

My full testimony recounts the numerous occasions that I reported to my superiors the concerns I had for the PMI's actions, most of which were initiated through reports from Mr. Boutris. The record will show these warnings and requests for assistance were ignored, shelved, or responded to with smokescreen events like office audits or forced mediation, but did nothing to address the safety implications of what I was reporting.

Finally, in late March, when I became aware of Gawadzinski's role in allowing Southwest to fly unsafe airplanes contrary to an AD, I reported the circumstances to my superiors and called for an investigation. Soon afterward, I found that Gawadzinski had allowed Southwest to overfly required rudder system inspections and did also suppress this information, which I reported to my superiors. Their response was a chilling telephone call where I was informed that the region wanted to keep this matter very quiet and low key. Within five days I was removed from my position as Office Manager.

In my view, my actions over the period of my tenure as Southwest CMO were focused on the elimination of a serious deficiency in the maintenance oversight of the carrier, an imperative I felt I could not ignore even though I could not be sure of its impact on my career. My actions were met with indifference or roadblocks at every turn from the regional level. The price of my effort to ensure safety, however, was not recognition, as perhaps might be expected for the first management official to report the incidents, but the humiliating ejection from my job under circumstances that could only invite questions as to whether it was a coverup attempt by the region.

Within a few weeks after my removal, and still very concerned about these matters, I wrote a prophetic e-mail to the Office Manager who succeeded me at the Southwest CMO. I had no idea then just how poignant my remarks would turn out to be. In the message I mentioned that I suspected the region was soft-peddling these events, and then I wrote, "My feeling is that this will likely not remain low profile, nor quiet. My advice to you as my successor would be to ensure that you are fully conversant with these two events, among others you may ultimately discover, and take what-

ever measures are necessary to validate the adequacy of Southwest's control over its maintenance program."

Because of the illumination of this unfortunate estimate, Mr. Sabatini has announced that he will take steps to improve employee communication at all levels, including a mechanism to encourage employees to take their concerns to a higher authority when there is a failure in the chain of command. Time will tell as to whether this will be effective, and I would add to that initiative a recommendation that higher level FAA managers be rotated periodically so as to lessen the likelihood that a dysfunctional management team perhaps too willing to give in to outside influence can perpetuate what in this case can only be termed a hoax on the flying public.

I thank this honorable Committee for the opportunity to present this information.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Thank you very much, Mr. Mills. Your last comment about rotating high-level personnel comes right along with the earlier proposal I made of limiting the revolving door.

Mr. Hayes?

Mr. HAYES. Mr. Chairman, if I could interrupt just a moment. I have a statement from the Southwest Airline Pilots Group that I would like to submit under unanimous consent for the record. They are obviously a very important part of the whole safety program and not knowing what time constraints are going to do, I would like to give it to you.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Without objection, the material will be included in the record, along with the testimony from Southwest Airlines.

Mr. HAYES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Cotti.

Mr. COTTI. Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee. My name is Paul Eugene Cotti. I am currently an Airworthiness Unit Supervisor in the FAA's AMR Certificates Management Office. I have been in the FAA Flight Standards Service for nearly 18 years, four as a Principal Inspector and over three now as a frontline supervisor.

My work experiences prior to the FAA include a variety of aviation maintenance-related positions in commercial and military aviation. Like so many in the FAA Flight Standards Service, I care very deeply about ensuring the safety of the flying public and for FAA's success in achieving the objectives of its critical mission. I am honored to be appearing before you today.

I served as the Geographic Unit Supervisor in the Southwest Airlines CMO from March 2005 to May 2007. During that entire period, the Office's management team was often divided on matters relating to the management and oversight of the Southwest Airlines operating certificate. This division can be summarized as being between management officials that insisted on adherence to the stated and implied intent of FAA orders and those that insisted on exercising degrees of latitude and discretion that often fell well outside of the parameters of those orders.

Under the banner of collaboration with the airline, the latter group, whose most important or prominent member was the Supervisory Principal Maintenance Inspector, did so in a manner that