

As long as the FAA thinks of the airlines as their client, thinks of the airlines as their customer, that culture of safety is not going to take hold and not going to permeate the organization.

Oh, Ms. Johnson has arrived, our Chair of the Water Resources Subcommittee. At this time, the Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas.

Ms. JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding this hearing.

I ask unanimous consent to put my statement in the record.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Without objection, so ordered.

Ms. JOHNSON. I apologize for having to leave out earlier, but I just want to be very quick with this.

As I see the problem, I put most of the blame on FAA because if FAA inspects and reports it to the right avenue, then I cannot understand why an airline would not take heed. So what I would like to hear from you is where is the kink? Is it the buddy system? What is it?

Where does it fall off the line? Anybody or all?

Mr. COTTI. Ms. Johnson, I would submit that it becomes an issue of integrity. I think a lot of the issues we were talking about today have had to do with the integrity of one or several individuals. Integrity is one of the core values of our organization.

And, I think there is lots of ways to look at this, but this wasn't rocket science. This was there was an opportunity to make a decision, and the wrong decision was made, and I think it goes down to integrity with individuals

Ms. JOHNSON. Do you think rotating employees?

I know that it takes a certain amount of expertise for the inspectors, but it seems to me that when people stay in one place a long time they kind of get accustomed to letting things slide based upon the fact that they don't think it will be immediately that of a problem.

I have been trying to think through where we start. Do we prohibit FAA employees from going to work for a private airline for at least two years after they leave FAA or what do you think?

I know it has to start from the top, but it has not started from the top, it seems to me. So I am trying to deal with the problem.

Mr. MILLS. Well, I think that would certainly be a step in the right direction. In this particular case, the employee who left the FAA and went to work for Southwest Airlines certainly raised the question in my mind about propriety and, because of that, I asked for an investigation of that instance.

So I think it would be very helpful to have a waiting period before an inspector leaves the FAA and goes to work for industry.

Ms. JOHNSON. Anyone else? Do you concur?

Mr. PETERS. Yes, I do.

Ms. JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Thank you, Ms. Johnson.

I don't want to leave an impression here about whether the situation under discussion today with Southwest and the FAA is limited only to this particular FSDO.

Even if there were problems only with Southwest, it is clear that we have a structural problem at FAA. The problem at the operating level between the maintenance inspector and the air carrier

is evident in the testimony, but the chain of command above the inspector level was at fault, and that suggests that it could well be at fault elsewhere in the FAA and other Flight Standards District Offices. Correcting the problem at the top has to be our primary concern.

I want to thank this panel for their candor, their integrity, for putting public service ahead of private interest and personal interest, for risking yourselves for the safety of the flying public. You have done aviation and aviation safety an immense service. Thank you.

The panel is dismissed.

Mr. BOUTRIS. Thank you, sir.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Our next panel consists of the Honorable Calvin Scovel, Inspector General of DOT; Scott Bloch, Special Counsel, the U.S. Office of Special Counsel; Mr. Nicholas Sabatini, Associate Administrator for Aviation Safety at FAA; Mr. James Ballough, the Director of Flight Standards Service; Mr. Thomas Stuckey, Manager, Flight Standards Division, FAA Southwest Region.

I ask you all 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 are sworn in, and we thank you for your presence at the hearing.

Mr. Scovel, we will begin with you.

TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE CALVIN L. SCOVEL, III, INSPECTOR GENERAL, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION; THE HONORABLE SCOTT J. BLOCH, SPECIAL COUNSEL, U.S. OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL COUNSEL; NICHOLAS A. SABATINI, ASSOCIATE ADMINISTRATOR FOR AVIATION SAFETY, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION; JAMES J. BALLOUGH, DIRECTOR, FLIGHT STANDARDS SERVICE, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION; AND THOMAS STUCKEY, MANAGER, FLIGHT STANDARDS DIVISION, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, SOUTHWEST REGION

Mr. SCOVEL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I apologize, but if I may request what I hope will be a minor departure from protocol. I know the Committee's time is limited. I estimate, however, that I will need about eight minutes for my oral statement in order to inform the Committee of our findings, our conclusions regarding FAA's programs and our recommendations.

Mr. OBERSTAR. We do not want to limit witnesses arbitrarily by time. I want you to give your testimony and what you think is necessary in your oral remarks. Your written testimony, of course, will be part of the record, and I have read all of that already anyway, but please proceed.

Mr. SCOVEL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Petri, Members of the Committee.

At the request of this Committee, we are reviewing FAA's handling of whistleblower concerns regarding Southwest Airlines' failure to follow a critical FAA airworthiness directive or AD. As you heard from the first panel, these are serious matters.