

Most importantly, if there was a question about the technical compliance with an AD, the carriers grounded the affected aircraft rather than take a chance that they were in non-compliance. This is certainly the right response to a potential safety risk.

While it is certainly not my intention to underplay the severity and egregious nature of what happened at Southwest Airlines, the initial findings of the special emphasis surveillance support what we all know to be true. By any standard, this is the safest period in the history of aviation. I say this every time I appear before you because I am extremely and extraordinarily proud of the hard work and dedication it took by the thousands of safety aviation professionals in both industry and the FAA to get us to this point.

It is not a miracle, it is not a coincidence, and it is not good luck. It is finding a way to identify and focus on risk in order to effectively address it before it can result in an accident. Clearly, the accident rate reflects that this is working.

One of the reasons we have been able to do what we have done so effectively is because of the important information we receive from the airlines, their employees and even their aircraft through voluntary reporting programs. Without these programs, we had access to such limited information, less than 5 percent of what we are receiving now. Identifying and responding to risk often involved using information we learned about as a result of an accident.

Because of these programs, we now have access to a great deal of information that we can analyze and evaluate to assist in identifying trends that point to the risk we need to stay ahead of. Again, the accident rate supports that using the information obtained through these programs is effective.

It is entirely appropriate for us to discuss how these programs are implemented and where the line should be drawn between getting the information and taking enforcement action. I am happy to talk about this today and at any time in the future, but it is my hope that as we assess what happened at Southwest Airlines or the value of reporting programs or the relationship between FAA and industry, we do not lose sight of the fact that the system is safe, and I will continue to work as hard as I can to keep it safe.

Mr. Chairman, I will be happy to answer your questions at this time.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Thank you very much.

Mr. Ballough.

Mr. BALLOUGH. Mr. Chairman, the FAA had one opening statement, and we stand ready to answer your questions.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Okay, neither you nor Mr. Stuckey has a comment. Thank you very much.

Well, very powerful testimony, Mr. Scovel, Mr. Bloch and a very interesting rebuttal, in a sense, response from Mr. Sabatini.

Mr. Scovel, you say corrective action is urgently needed, and then you set forth several specifics: an independent body to investigate inspector concerns; transfer supervisory inspectors, that is move them around within the system, so they don't get too comfortable.

The State Department does that with our overseas personnel. They get three years at one station. They are moved to another. The military does that. The Corps of Engineers does it with district