

STATEMENT OF THE
THE HONORABLE JERRY F. COSTELLO
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE
HEARING ON
CRITICAL LAPSES IN FAA SAFETY OVERSIGHT OF AIRLINES: ABUSES OF REGULATORY PARTNERSHIP
PROGRAMS
APRIL 3, 2008

- I want to thank Chairman Oberstar for holding today's hearing on Critical Lapses in FAA Safety Oversight of Our Airlines: Abuses of Regulatory Partnership Programs.

- In recent weeks, some airline passengers have experienced canceled flights because of safety inspections, making many question the safety of our aviation system.

- Make no mistake – the United States has the safest air transportation system in the world; however, I have said time and again, we must not become complacent about our past success.

- Chairman Oberstar has given a very good description of the problems we are dealing with today – there was a failure on the part of Southwest Airlines to comply with important safety directives and there was a failure on the part of FAA to do its job by allowing Southwest to fly planes that should have been grounded.

- Let me be clear -- what happened in this instance should never have happened and should never happen again.

- The American people expect our airlines to comply with all safety regulations and we expect that the FAA will not simply trust that the airlines are complying – the FAA needs to verify that information through on-site inspections and other safety approaches.

- The FAA and Southwest Airlines both acknowledge safety lapses regarding airworthiness directive compliance and that corrective action had to be taken to address the problem, including a proposed \$10.2 million fine against Southwest Airlines.

- However, the broader question is the FAA's ability to adequately oversee air carrier maintenance programs and the associate partnership programs. The incident demonstrates that it is not enough to establish maintenance programs – we must ensure vigorous oversight by the FAA to maintain the highest level of safety.

- While Southwest had a solid safety record until this incident, Southwest was in violation of a safety regulation in 2007. Southwest needs to explain how and why this happened and what procedures they have implemented to catch these and other problems from occurring in the future.

- In addition, the FAA needs to explain how this serious safety breach happened, why the system did not catch a safety inspector's inability to fulfill his duties; why it took the FAA so long to assess a penalty against Southwest; what actions they have taken against the employees and supervisors involved; and what they have done to implement a checks and balance system to prevent this in the future.

- Safety cannot be compromised in an effort to treat airlines like "customers." Rather, the FAA should be vigilant in ensuring air carrier compliance and be willing to take enforcement action when necessary.

- In my capacity as Chairman of the Aviation Subcommittee, I have noticed a pattern with the FAA – the FAA is a reactive agency – not a proactive agency.

- We have seen it in the area of runway safety; improving conditions at our air traffic control facilities; congestion and delays at our airports and in the sky; and now this serious matter.

- It is a continuous pattern – the FAA only acts when pushed into action by the Aviation Subcommittee or this full Committee.

- Congress, the FAA, and air carriers must make safety the top priority. We cannot have the agency responsible for aviation safety rely on the past or blindly trust the airlines to self-police without aggressive oversight and enforcement. The American traveling public deserves no less.

- Again, thank you Mr. Chairman for holding this hearing. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.