

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Ron Johnson
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations
“Boeing’s Broken Safety Culture: CEO Dave Calhoun Testifies”
June 18, 2024

As submitted to the record:

In April, current and former Boeing employees testified before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (“the Subcommittee” or “PSI”) raising concerns about Boeing’s manufacturing processes and calling into question Boeing’s commitment to airplane safety. At that hearing, Sam Salehpour, a current Boeing engineer, alleged that the 787 and 777 airplanes suffer from serious manufacturing flaws that could result in potentially catastrophic safety risks. Ed Pierson, a former Boeing engineer, described the safety concerns he raised about the 737 airplanes when he worked for the company. Both witnesses stated that Boeing officials ignored their concerns.

Following the hearing, nine additional whistleblowers contacted the Subcommittee to share similar instances about Boeing’s failure to address manufacturing deficiencies. Many of these whistleblowers also spoke about Boeing’s culture of retaliation against employees who raise potential safety issues. As I stated at the April hearing, if Boeing takes its commitment to safety seriously, it cannot tolerate a culture that ignores or suppresses engineering and whistleblower concerns.

At that hearing, I also emphasized the importance of receiving testimony and information from Boeing, the Federal Aviation Administration (“FAA”), and the airlines about the steps those entities will take to address the safety warnings from Boeing engineers. I am pleased that Boeing’s Chief Executive Officer David Calhoun agreed to testify before the Subcommittee today to discuss these issues. I hope Mr. Calhoun will take advantage of this opportunity to provide the public with full transparency about the problems Boeing has faced and how it will correct course.

I also expect Mr. Calhoun to commit to Boeing’s full cooperation with the Subcommittee’s investigation. To date, Boeing has provided very few responsive records to the Subcommittee’s March 19, 2024 letter requesting information about the safety and manufacturing of 787 and 777 airplanes. While Boeing has produced approximately 1.7 million pages of records, the vast majority of those records consist of raw data that do not appear to be responsive to the Subcommittee’s requests.

The Subcommittee also wrote to FAA requesting its assessments and risk-based reviews of Boeing 777 and 787 aircraft, among other records. FAA continues to fail to provide those documents. The Subcommittee expects Boeing and FAA to fully cooperate with its investigation. Anything less than that is unacceptable.

Boeing and FAA owe the public complete transparency and the truth when it comes to the manufacturing and inspection of Boeing airplanes. Earlier this year, after a door plug blew off a Boeing 737 MAX, the FAA ordered Boeing to develop a comprehensive plan to address safety issues at the company. Last month, Boeing presented its proposals to FAA Administrator Mike Whitaker who called it “a guide for a new way for Boeing to do business.”¹ Boeing’s plan included steps to improve employee training and safety reporting and to increase internal audits and supplier oversight.² FAA also stated that it will continue to increase its oversight of Boeing and its suppliers.³

These proposed actions are long overdue. For years, Boeing whistleblowers have been calling for meaningful change from the company, but were ignored. It should not have to take a handful of safety incidents on Boeing aircraft—or even worse, the tragedy of an airplane crash—to motivate Boeing, FAA, or the airlines to fulfill their commitment to safety.

I, along with the rest of the traveling public, want Boeing to succeed. Americans want to feel safe when they are in the air and they should feel safe.⁴ Based on multiple metrics, aviation is still the “safest mode of transportation.”⁵ The reality is that airline crashes are rare—the last fatal domestic airline crash occurred in February 2009—but that fact brings little comfort to those who have lost a loved one in an airplane incident.⁶

Safety, transparency, and accountability should be paramount at Boeing and I hope that today’s hearing will allow the public to glean whether that is the case.

I thank the witness for his testimony.

¹ Gregory Wallace, *3-hour meeting ends with FAA saying Boeing can’t increase Max plane production until quality is fixed*, CNN, May 30, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/30/business/boeing-safety-plan-faa/index.html>.

² Press release, *FAA Continues to Hold Boeing Accountable for Implementing Safety and Production Quality Fixes*, Federal Aviation Administration, May 30, 2024, <https://www.faa.gov/newsroom/faa-continues-hold-boeing-accountable-implementing-safety-and-production-quality-fixes>.

³ *Id.*

⁴ Juliana Kim, *Why flying is still safe despite high-profile problems*, NPR, Mar. 12, 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2024/03/12/1237262132/why-flying-safe-united-airlines-boeing>.

⁵ Jacopo Prisco, *Worried about how safe it is to fly? Here’s what the experts have to say*, CNN, Feb. 10, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/travel/worried-about-flying-heres-what-the-experts-have-to-say/index.html>.

⁶ *Id.*, Leslie Josephs, *The last fatal US airline crash was a decade ago. Here’s why our skies are safer*, CNBC, Mar. 8, 2019, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/02/13/colgan-air-crash-10-years-ago-reshaped-us-aviation-safety.html>; Ben Cohen, *Flying in America Has Actually Never Been Safer*, Wall Street Journal, Jan. 12, 2024, <https://www.wsj.com/business/airlines/plane-safety-airlines-boeing-never-been-safer-adbe2453>; Ian Savage, *Comparing the fatality risks in United States transportation across modes and over time*, ELSEVIER (Jan. 21, 2013), available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0739885912002156>.