

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Ron Johnson
“Examining Boeing’s Broken Safety Culture: Firsthand Accounts”
April 17, 2024

As submitted to the record:

Recent reports on mechanical and technical failures involving Boeing aircraft have jeopardized the public’s confidence in Boeing airplanes. So far this year, there have been at least six high-profile incidents involving Boeing airplanes: On January 5, a door plug flew off of an Alaska Airlines Boeing 737 MAX 9; on January 18, an engine failed on an Atlas Air 747 cargo plane; on January 23, a nose tire fell off of a Delta Air lines Boeing 757; on March 7, a tire fell off of a United Airlines Boeing 777-200 shortly after takeoff; on March 11, a LATAM Airlines Boeing 787 unexpectedly went into a midair nosedive; and just ten days ago, on April 7, an engine cover fell off of a Southwest Airlines Boeing 737-800.¹

These incidents are alarming and raise questions about the overall safety of Boeing aircraft and the quality of Boeing’s manufacturing processes. Today we will hear from Mr. Sam Salehpour, a current engineer at Boeing, who has come forward with new and troubling information that may help this Subcommittee, the federal government, and the public better understand the root causes for some of these mechanical failures.

Last month, Mr. Salehpour spoke with the Subcommittee about potentially catastrophic safety risks associated with Boeing 787 and 777 airplanes. He told the Subcommittee that due to faulty engineering, 787 fleets may have defective parts that could cause premature failure, potentially leading to accidents and passenger fatalities. Mr. Salehpour also informed the Subcommittee about significant misalignments between parts in the assembly of hundreds of 777 airplanes. When Mr. Salehpour brought his concerns about these aircraft to Boeing officials, he said the company failed to take any action and retaliated against him.

This is not the first time Boeing has apparently disregarded its employees’ safety concerns. Mr. Ed Pierson, who is a former Boeing engineer and also a witness at today’s hearing, informed the Subcommittee that in 2018, the company ignored him when he identified production problems associated with the 737 airplanes.

If Boeing takes its commitment to safety seriously, it cannot cultivate a culture that ignores engineering and whistleblower concerns. Further, while Boeing has publicly stated that “retaliation is strictly prohibited,” any retaliation by Boeing against its employees for identifying safety issues is inexcusable and will inevitably lead to additional problems going unreported.²

Nearly one month ago, the Subcommittee wrote to Boeing raising concerns about employee retaliation and requested its whistleblower policies and protocols as well as records relating to safety reports and the manufacturing of Boeing 777 and 787 aircraft. To date, Boeing

¹ Leo Sands, *Falling Parts and a ‘Nosedive’: 6 Probes Involving Boeing Planes This Year*, WASH. POST (Apr. 9, 2024), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2024/04/09/boeing-plane-investigations-list/>.

² Joel Rose, *Another Boeing Whistleblower Says He Faced Retaliation for Reporting ‘Shortcuts,’* NPR (Apr. 12, 2024), <https://www.npr.org/2024/04/12/1244147895/boeing-whistleblower-retaliation-shortcuts-787-dreamliner>.

has provided minimal responsive records. The Subcommittee also wrote to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), requesting documents relating to its assessments and risk-based reviews of Boeing 777 and 787 aircraft. Although the FAA has publicly confirmed that it is investigating Mr. Salehpour's allegations, it has failed to provide any responsive records to the Subcommittee at this time.³ If the Subcommittee faces a lack of transparency from Boeing, FAA, or any other entity, it should be prepared to use compulsory process to obtain information that could better inform the public about potential safety risks of Boeing aircraft.

The Subcommittee has also spoken to representatives of airline companies that rely on Boeing airplanes. Just like Boeing and FAA, those companies should be prepared to explain to the Subcommittee their awareness of and plans to address potential engineering problems with Boeing aircraft in order to ensure the public's safety.

Safety must be paramount at Boeing and yet the company's public filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission show that its focus may be elsewhere. According to a report, in 2022, Boeing "changed its incentive plan from giving executives bonuses based on passenger safety, employee safety, and quality to rewarding them if they hit climate and DEI targets."⁴ In 2023, Boeing boasted "for the first time in our company's history, we tied incentive compensation to inclusion."⁵ Boeing cannot allow the prioritization of DEI to get in the way of maintaining strict safety and quality standards.

On January 5, 2024, when the door plug blew off the Boeing 737 Max airplane shortly after takeoff, one passenger reportedly texted her parents, "the masks [are] down" and "I am so scared right now."⁶ The passenger said she felt like she was going to die.⁷ Terrifying incidents like this one are unacceptable and may have been completely preventable. Boeing, FAA, and the airlines must provide the public with complete transparency about the integrity of Boeing aircraft, heed the safety warnings from Boeing engineers, and take the necessary steps to fix mechanical issues before any passenger steps foot inside the airplane.

I thank the witnesses for their testimony.

³ Mark Walker & James Glanz, *F.A.A. Investigates Claims by Boeing Whistle-Blower About Flaws in 787 Dreamliner*, N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 9, 2024), <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/09/us/politics/boeing-787-dreamliner-whistle-blower.html>.

⁴ Shannon Thaler, Boeing prioritizing diversity and inclusion over flier safety, Elon Musk says after near-catastrophic Alaska Airlines mishap, N.Y. Post, Jan. 11, 2024, https://nypost.com/2024/01/11/business/elon-musk-rips-boeing-they-prioritized-dei-over-safety/?utm_campaign=nypost&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.

⁵ Boeing, Global Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Report, at 2 (2023), available at https://www.boeing.com/content/dam/boeing/boeingdotcom/principles/diversity-and-inclusion/assets/pdf/Boeing_GEDI_Report_FINAL.pdf.

⁶ Silvia Foster-Frau et al., *'It Was Eerily Calm': How Passengers Coped During Harrowing Alaska Airlines Flight*, WASH. POST (Jan. 8, 2024), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/travel/2024/01/08/boeing-alaska-airlines-flight-calm-passengers/>.

⁷ *Id.*