



AIRCRAFT MECHANICS FRATERNAL ASSOCIATION

National Office: 7853 E. Arapahoe Court, Suite 1100 • Centennial, CO 80112
Tel: 303.752.AMFA (2632) • Fax: 303.362.7736

February 8, 2019

Gary Kelly, CEO
Southwest Airlines
P.O. Box 36611
2702 Love Field Drive
Dallas, TX 75235-1611

Dear Mr. Gary Kelly:

The degradation of Southwest's aircraft maintenance safety culture has been recognized by the FAA, reputable media sources, and Landon Nitschke himself. Your personal involvement in restoring Southwest's safety culture is long past due.

The CBS News investigative report, *Accident Waiting to Happen*, exposed to millions of Americans Southwest management's resort to coercive practices to deter Aircraft Maintenance Technicians (AMTs) from reporting aircraft damage. To those of us who turn the wrenches, however, this was old news. The CBS report merely echoed the existing findings of the FAA, the Office of the Inspector General, and Mr. Nitschke himself who confessed that at Southwest "we hide our compliance issues under the Warrior Spirit."

In a recent investigatory report, the FAA described Southwest's abandonment of maintenance safety culture in chilling terms:

The environment at Southwest Airlines; specifically lack of communication, lack of training (AHM program, SA-M 1057 use), perception that airworthiness findings will result in disciplinary actions for all involved to include mid-level managers, if not addressed **will impact the value of quality having a direct effect on the status of aircraft airworthiness. ...**

The motivation behind management questioning AMTs and Inspectors when they discover anything outside the scope of a maintenance task and the subsequent use of formal fact-finding meetings which management utilizes to formally document an inquiry into airworthiness discrepancies, appears as a tool used to influence a relaxing of standards, to look the other way, or to gain a degree of approval through a leniency of standards. **The result of this pattern is a capitulation of airworthiness and a culture of fear and retribution.**

Federal Aviation Administration, *ACTION: Report of Investigation of Whistleblower Complaint Number WB17582, Southwest Airlines, Inc.* at pp. 54-55 (emphasis added).

According to Public Record, Southwest Airlines (and AirTran) has been fined for violations 45 times by the FAA and OSHA since 2012, and 291 times since 2000.

These statistics are alarming. Nonetheless, our AMTs know, and the DOT's Office of Inspector ("OIG") has recognized, that the FAA is just scratching the surface with respect to the issue of declining maintenance standards at Southwest:

[R]ecent events have raised concerns about FAA's safety oversight, particularly for Southwest Airlines, one of the largest part 121 carriers in the United States. On April 17, 2018, Southwest Airlines Flight 1380 suffered an engine failure and debris penetrated the aircraft cabin, resulting in the first U.S. passenger fatality in over 9 years.

Indeed, the OIG recently received numerous hotline complaints regarding a number of operational issues at Southwest Airlines, such as alleged pilot training deficiencies, which raise further concerns about the FAA's oversight of the carrier.

AMFA has addressed these concerns to Southwest on multiple occasions via formal correspondence to you and Southwest's maintenance managers. We have identified the issues and described the inherent danger of Southwest continuing to maintain the fewest mechanics per aircraft of any major carrier. However, Southwest has either ignored these good faith warnings or, worse still, denigrated our efforts. For example, in a letter from Mike Van De Ven dated February 23, 2018, he alleged that AMFA "crossed the line by publicly calling into question ... [Southwest's] focus on safety."

Our actions are dictated by a growing sense that Southwest will take no meaningful action to address its continuing decline. Southwest AMTs and management itself know that what CBS reported is merely the tip of the iceberg. Notwithstanding Nitschke's admissions, Trevor Stedke's acknowledgements regarding the operation of unairworthy aircraft and the damning FAA investigatory reports, the decline continues. Indeed, the retention of abusive managers in their positions, and the persistence of their coercive tactics, is a direct cause of ongoing whistleblower litigation in 2019.

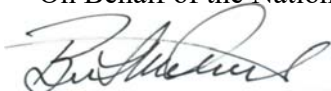
Gary, it is the frontline employees at Southwest that are the last line of defense and responsible for the safety of their co-workers and the flying public. We desperately need a Southwest leader to own and recognize that there is a problem, identify the root cause of the problem, and pursue effective solutions. A leader cannot simply ignore the problem and hope it goes away. AMFA will not stand idly by as our members are bullied, harassed, or threatened into taking shortcuts in maintenance. We will not sacrifice safety in favor of revenue.

The unfortunate culture of fear and retribution is what led to the AMTs' "vote of no confidence" in Landon Nitschke on February 22, 2018. Your maintenance employees have emphatically communicated their view that there must be accountability for the degradation of safety for Southwest employees. However, instead of holding Mr. Nitschke accountable, you have rewarded his failures by promoting him to Senior Vice President after multiple reports from the FAA, which confirmed that Southwest's maintenance supervisors have engaged in a pattern of coercive conduct toward the airline's AMTs, which has degraded the safety culture at Southwest and placed the safety of the flying public at risk.

The degradation of our once-great culture begins at the top and someone needs to address it. These safety culture problems and concerns just don't magically disappear. Our shared objective of operating a safe and profitable airline industry cannot be achieved by cutting corners on aircraft maintenance. AMFA and its members stand behind our credo: "Safety in the air begins with quality maintenance on the ground."

We implore you, as CEO of this airline, to step up and take the lead in addressing these issues.

On Behalf of the National Executive Council,



Bret Oestreich
National Director