

## (April 3, 2008) Lipinski Slams FAA for Lapses in Airline Safety Inspections

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#### Promises Increased Oversight of FAA to Protect Airline Safety

[Washington, D.C.] Today, in an Oversight and Investigations Hearing held by the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Congressman Dan Lipinski called for a comprehensive review of the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) airline safety inspection process. The hearing follows an extensive investigation undertaken by the Committee that revealed lapses in airplane safety inspections which appear to have resulted from a dangerously cozy relationship between FAA inspectors and the airlines they oversee.

"The FAA is specifically charged by Congress to ensure the safety of the flying public, but this investigation demonstrates that they have lost sight of that mission," said Rep. Lipinski. "The FAA must serve the safety of the public, not the desires of the airlines. I strongly urge the FAA to conduct a thorough review of its current safety inspection practices, and I look forward to working with my colleagues on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee to ensure the FAA is fulfilling its airline safety responsibilities."

Today's hearing featured two FAA inspectors who acted as whistleblowers in alerting the Committee to the apparent collusion between certain FAA officials and the airlines. In the testimony they presented, these whistleblowers provided details of an FAA culture that discourages fining or reprimanding airlines for violations of FAA regulations. They also discussed the often friendly relationships between FAA management and airline officials that may have led to lax standards.

"My district is home to Midway Airport and O'Hare Airport is nearby," said Rep. Lipinski. "So when we talk about airline safety, it's important to remember that we're not just talking about the safety of the flying public. We're also talking about the millions of people, such as my constituents, who have countless flights passing overhead each day. Consequently, the safety of my constituents and the flying public depends on the FAA doing its job, and I intend to make sure they do so."

Since news of this hearing broke last month, several major U.S. airlines have voluntarily grounded much of their fleets to undergo updated safety inspections. Many analysts believe these groundings represent preemptive action by the airlines to avoid costly fines levied by an FAA eager to prove to Congress that it can carry out its airline safety inspection mission.

&ldquo;Nearly every major airline seems to be playing catch-up on safety inspections that should have been taking place all along,&rdquo; said Rep. Lipinski. &ldquo;As a result, airline customers are paying the price in delayed and cancelled flights. In the long-term though, I hope we will be able to look back at today&rsquo;s hearing as a turning point in FAA practices and an important milestone in improving the safety of air travel.&rdquo;