

Statement of John D. Rockefeller IV
Chairman
Aviation Subcommittee
Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
Hearing on FAA Oversight of Foreign Repair Stations
June 20, 2007

The oversight of aviation safety is one of this Subcommittee's primary responsibilities. The government has no more important role in making sure that our nation's aviation system remains the safest in the world.

I want to thank Senator McCaskill for requesting this hearing and aggressively seeking to improve our nation's aviation safety. And, I would like to thank our other witnesses for coming today as well.

I have a few brief remarks and then will ask other Senators if they have opening statements.

First, I want to state that I firmly believe that the United States has the safest and best air system in the world. I do not want to give anyone the impression that I believe it is unsafe to fly.

But, the aviation industry continues to change rapidly in light of unrelenting competitive pressures. I am concerned that the quickly changing nature of the commercial aviation industry coupled with the FAA's declining level of resources threatens the agency's ability to maintain the necessary level of oversight of air carriers, foreign repair stations, and upgrade the existing safety infrastructure at our airports.

Although I understand why many commercial airlines are contracting out an increasing amount of their maintenance work, I am concerned that this work is being sent to foreign countries where governmental oversight from both the home nation and FAA may be weak or non-existent.

Compounding the industry's trend to outsource much of its significant maintenance work is the inability of the FAA to certify and closely monitor an ever increasing number of foreign repair stations. I do not question the agency's commitment to safety. I believe that this is due mainly to a lack of resources.

I am deeply concerned that the FAA is losing a number of its most senior safety inspectors and does not have the ability to replace all of them. This Committee, as it begins evaluating the future of the FAA, should be spending a considerable amount of its time making sure that the agency is able to meet its foremost mission – the safety of the traveling public.

Again, I want to thank Senator McCaskill for her leadership on this issue.