

Senator Cantwell and Chairman Wicker,

Thank you for all of your work on aviation safety.

Mr. Dickson has said that he will not release the Max until he has flown the plane himself and is confident enough to put his family on the plane. I would put this question to Mr. Dickson: would he put his family on a Boeing Max 737 with a foreign pilot? Deputy Elwell has told me himself that the FAA blames foreign pilot training and skill level on the Max crashes, and it is a tactic to deflect blame. Boeing has a responsibility to ensure that pilots in developing countries have the training required to fly the planes they are sold, and the FAA shares in that responsibility as regulator. The blame for the Max crashes lies squarely on the FAA and Boeing, not the pilots, and that has plainly been shown by the e-mails between Boeing and FAA personnel. Simulator training was requested and discouraged, software was overlaid on hardware issues, and the same simulators that were discouraged were also problematic in their scenarios. Touting human factors research is another obfuscation of the issue with the Boeing Max crashes, there is no amount of human factors research that could have resolved how MCAS brought down both of those planes, and the intimation that it could have is another deflection of culpability. I worked in the Human Factors lab at the FAA William J. Hughes Technical Center and have witnessed Air Traffic Control Simulations. The Engineering Research Psychologists do not have access to the proprietary fielded software, simulators run on different hardware architecture and software. Software cannot correct hardware flaws and human factors is so much more than pilot reaction.

At one of our family meetings with the FAA, a family member asked the FAA leaders to be “soldiers” in dealing with Boeing and the Max tragedy (HD). It is an apt request to our FAA management with its military roots, our air traffic control that still calls planes “targets” in certain research circles, and the war against the cold hand of capitalist indexes versus the safety of the flying public. Passengers rely on the FAA to ensure their safety, whether that American manufactured plane is in US or foreign airspace. Dismissing the crash as an issue with foreign pilot training is dodging the real issue, demand has made us lax in ensuring the engineering is sound. I would pay more for my ticket and so would anyone who suspected they might not touch down safely.

My husband worked at the FAA for over twenty years as an electrician, and he attended a meeting with the families and the FAA. He told them that he has seen serious issues over the years: fires with obvious cause, safety violations, whatever it was – and someone was always fired. Someone lost their job when a serious infraction occurred, as public servants someone has to take responsibility. Why has no one lost their job over the Boeing Max 737 crashes? No one died in the circumstances my husband was referring to, and yet someone was fired. It’s a fair question to ask, if you work at an agency and see people fired for smaller infractions and then your brother-in-law dies, why is the FAA leadership immune to change? I know Mr. Dickson knows how to do the right thing, I have reached out to him to do the right thing and I have seen him make it happen on other matters. Administrator Dickson, we need more than a soldier, we need a General.

Two things need to be fixed to fight the war on value engineering and failed oversight (at the very least): The FAA needs to be able to hire the most experienced engineers in order to do regulate, and it needs funding that does not rely on Congressional budget cycles. In other words, money and manpower. It is a start, as is the SMS the FAA has asked for. Boeing needs to be accountable to their passengers more than their shareholders.

I leave you with this: I woke up yesterday with a feeling a strange sense of calm, with an uncurrent of knowing something was off but not knowing what it was yet as I was still not quite awake. My dreams stayed in my reality for a few moments, and my brother was not dead, it was a mistake, he wasn't on the plane, he didn't come home in pieces. He was somehow safe in Nairobi, my family was not devastated, our world was restored to order, and life was not the wasteland of destruction grief leaves in its wake. But then the details came into focus, and my synthetic resurrection faded, and I awoke in my new dystopia. It is not easy for me to sit in these feelings and write to you, but I do it for every family member that only truly lives in the brief seconds before reality shakes us awake each morning, and every passenger who gets on a plane blissfully unaware of deadly mechanisms like MCAS.

Boeing, you have blown up my life; FAA, you have disappointed me and make me ashamed to say I worked for you. You have robbed the world of so many talented, selfless, and lovey people, you brought down a plane of humanitarians, and the irony will ring in the air for your every waking moment you do not do the right thing.

Tomra Vecere, sister of Matthew Vecere, ET302 victim