

WASHINGTON – U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell today called the Federal Aviation Administration’s flawed safety enforcement, which recently allowed an estimated 13,000 Sky Harbor passengers to fly on unsafe planes, “shocking and unacceptable.”

Mitchell’s comments came as part of a House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee hearing today on critical lapses in FAA safety oversight following revelations that Southwest Airlines allegedly flew as many as 117 planes in violation of mandatory safety checks, in some cases for as long as 30 months.

Mitchell, who participated in today’s hearing, is a member of the committee as well as its Subcommittee on Aviation. He cited an initial estimate provided to him by Southwest Airlines that approximately 13,000 Sky Harbor passengers on 125 flights were flown on planes in violation of mandatory safety checks.

Southwest Airlines is the second largest carrier at Sky Harbor, and Sky Harbor is Southwest’s third busiest airport in terms of departures.

Mitchell said there is growing evidence that a close relationship between federal regulators and airlines got in the way of safety.

“There’s no other way to say it: The FAA’s cozy relationship with the airlines put passengers at risk,” said Mitchell. “This is serious breach of the public trust. We must take immediate steps to improve airline safety and make clear that the FAA’s responsibility is to serve the public, not those it is supposed to regulate.”

The Department of Transportation Inspector General said the FAA “repeatedly allowed the airline to escape punishment for safety violations because of a close relationship between the airline and federal officials.” The Inspector General also revealed “that Southwest violated more federally required safety regulations than previously known.” [Source: [Dallas Morning News](#), April 3, 2008]

One FAA investigator turned whistleblower said “his efforts to ground Southwest Airlines for cracks in the fuselage were foiled by supervisors he said were friendly with the airline.” [Source: [Los Angeles Times](#), April 3, 2008]