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Southwest Airlines Maintains a Strong Safety Culture

Southwest Airlines Responds to Congressman Oberstar's Recent News Conference

DALLAS, March 7 /PRNewswire-FirstCall/ -- We share Congressman James Oberstar's feelings about the importance of a strong commitment to Safety. From its inception, Southwest Airlines (NYSE: LUV) has maintained a rigorous Culture of Safety-and has maintained that same dedication for more than 37 years. It is and always has been the airline's number one priority to ensure the Safety of every Southwest Customer and Employee. For example, the Airworthiness Directive referenced in the FAA Letter of Penalty involves skin inspections that were based on a plan developed right here at Southwest.

"We've got a 37-year history of very safe operations, one of the safest operations in the world, and we're safer today than we've ever been," said Southwest CEO Gary Kelly.

We also want to ensure you that Southwest Airlines is and has always been 100 percent compliant with the Rudder Airworthiness Directive (AD) referenced by Congressman Oberstar. The only rudder issue raised with us was never a violation of any FAA Airworthiness Directive. What was missed by Southwest was the accomplishment of a specific Boeing-required task pertaining to the Standby Rudder Power Control Unit (PCU), which has nothing to do with the Airworthiness Directive that Congressman Oberstar referenced. The Standby Rudder PCU is redundant; meaning, it is not powered on the vast majority of flights. To date, Southwest has performed the PCU check at issue over 200 times with zero failures.

The Airworthiness Directive referenced in the FAA Letter of Penalty involves one of many skin inspections on our aircraft and was never a safety of flight issue. Southwest actually performed the inspection, but missed inspecting an area of .006 of the total inspection area. Southwest helped develop the program in 1999, before it became an FAA directive. Boeing relied on Southwest's program to develop the Service Bulletin that led to the eventual Airworthiness Directive in question. Southwest has a long history of working with Boeing, consistently maintaining a leadership role in developing maintenance programs for the Boeing 737 aircraft. Southwest is the largest Boeing 737 operator in the World.

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