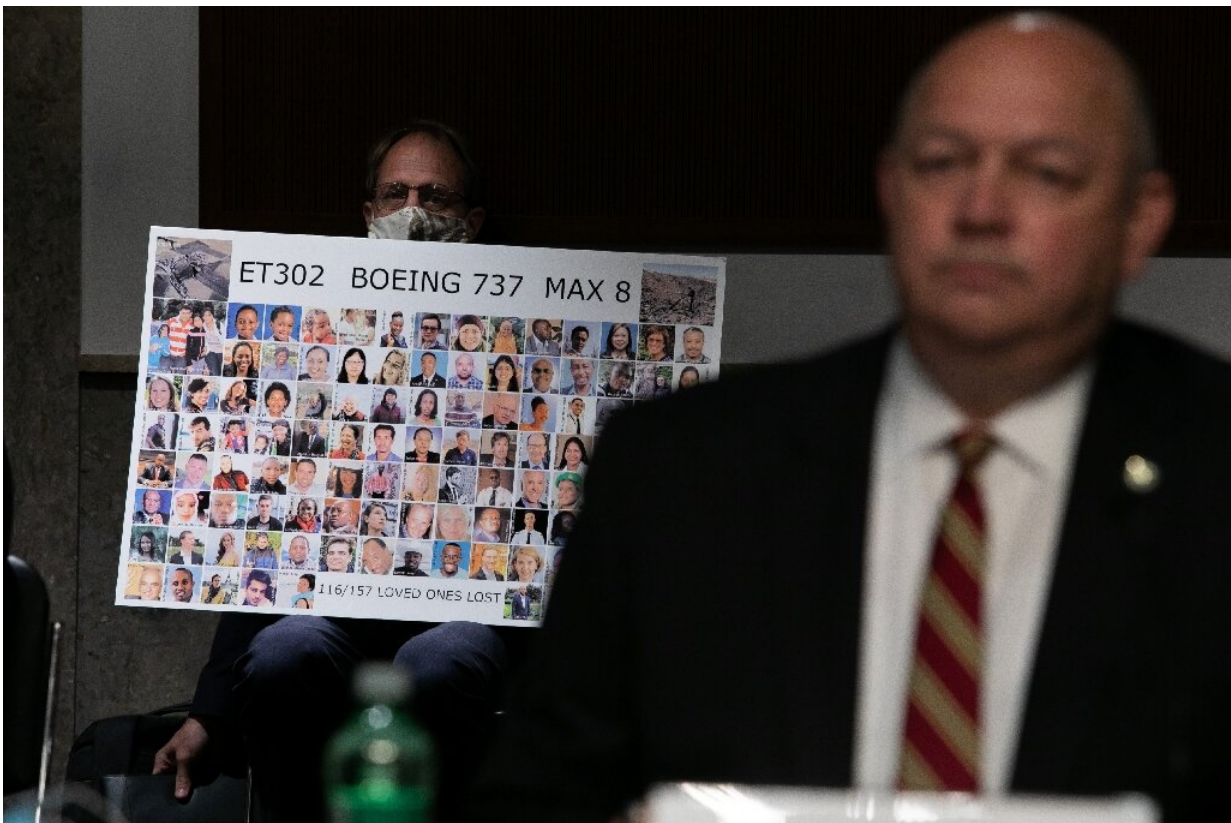


FAA chief accused of stonewalling Senate MAX probe

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Michael Stumo holds a sign displaying photographs of the those killed in the March 10, 2019 crash of Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 as Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) chief Steve Dickson testifies before a Senate panel

Senators from both parties accused the top US aviation regulator of

stonewalling Wednesday on inquiries into the 737 MAX crashes as they introduced legislation to revamp the plane certification process.

Senator Roger Wicker, a Mississippi Republican who chairs the Commerce Committee, said FAA staff had ignored numerous requests for information about the MAX, which has been grounded since March 2019 following two crashes that killed 346 people.

Wicker pointed to cases where his staff, at FAA's request, had narrowed requests to emails on specific dates involving specific parties and the agency had still not been forthcoming.

"It's hard not to conclude that your team at FAA has deliberately attempted to keep us in the dark," Wicker told FAA chief Steve Dickson.

"Agency stonewalling suggests discomfort for what might ultimately be revealed."

Although much has been learned about the MAX following myriad investigations, there are still questions about provocative documents that have surfaced over the months.

These include an internal FAA risk analysis after the first Boeing [crash](#) that said the MAX could suffer as many as 15 catastrophic accidents over its lifetime.

Dickson was unable to offer new information on that document or other disclosures, but said he was "committed" to oversight.

He pledged to comply with Wicker's request to designate a top official who would be accountable for future requests from senators.

The FAA chief reiterated he is following no set timetable for returning the MAX to service and said he would fly the plane personally before it is cleared for service.

Wicker and senior committee Democrat Maria Cantwell of Washington state introduced legislation to direct the FAA to tighten oversight of the certification process after government reviews said the FAA delegated too much authority to Boeing, allowing it to "self-certify" the MAX, in the words of critics.

The congressional hearing was the first on the Boeing crashes since the upheaval of COVID-19 and was less jammed than earlier session on a Capitol Hill now practicing social distancing.

Still, as with earlier hearings, the session was attended by family members of MAX victims—now wearing masks—who held pictures of loved ones killed in the crashes.

Michael Stumo, who lost his daughter Samya in the Ethiopian Airlines crash, told the Senate panel that Boeing has been arguing in court that the FAA's certification of the plane shields it from financial liability.

"We see a dichotomy between public actions and private behavior," Stumo said. "They apologize in public.... and then you look at the documents and it says 'we don't have to pay anything.'"

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