

Boeing whistleblower, found dead last week, told family friend, “If anything happens to me, it’s not suicide.”

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An ABC affiliate reported Friday that Boeing whistleblower John “Mitch” Barnett told a close family friend, “If anything happens to me, it’s not suicide.” The report came six days after Barnett, who was preparing for the third day of a deposition in his civil suit against Boeing, was found dead in his truck in his hotel parking lot. Officials quickly declared his death a suicide.

“I know he did not commit suicide,” continued Barnett’s friend, Jennifer (no last name given). “There’s no way. He loved life too much. He loved his family too much. He loved his brothers too much to put them through what they’re going through right now.”

Jennifer also commented: “Money can buy anything nowadays. There is a lot of evil in this world. ... Somebody didn’t like what he had to say and wanted to shut him up. They didn’t want it to come back on anyone, so that’s why they made it look like a suicide.

“I think everybody is in disbelief and can’t believe it. I don’t care what they say, I know that Mitch didn’t do that.”

Barnett was found dead last Saturday after failing to appear at a deposition in Charleston, South Carolina, in his defamation lawsuit against the aerospace giant. He had accused Boeing of deliberately undermining his career and reputation for raising serious safety concerns about Boeing’s production facility in Charleston.

Barnett was giving testimony as part of a so-called AIR21, which is how the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) refers to cases it receives as part of its Whistleblower Protection Program. According to an interview with Brian Knowles, Barnett’s lawyer, in the *Corporate Crime Reporter*:

John had been back and forth for quite some

time getting prepared. The defense examined him for their allowed seven hours under the rules on Thursday. I cross-examined him all day [Friday] and did not finish. We agreed to continue this morning at 10 a.m. [Co-counsel] Rob [Turkewitz] kept calling this morning and his phone would go to voicemail. We then asked the hotel to check on him. They found him in his truck dead from an alleged self-inflicted gunshot. We drove to the hotel and spoke with the police and the coroner.

While the exact details of Barnett’s current testimony remain private, he has been one of the most outspoken whistleblowers against Boeing for many years. He worked at Boeing from 1985 to 2017, mostly as a quality manager, a position that is supposed to ensure that defects and errors in an aircraft’s production are caught and fixed before the plane is certified for flight.

Barnett left the company in 2017 after a seven-year tenure at Boeing’s Charleston plant, which produces the 787 Dreamliner, during which he made numerous internal reports about safety violations, all of which were ignored by Boeing.

After he left, Barnett gave an interview to the *New York Times* revealing that he alerted Boeing management to clusters of metal slivers that could have cut into wiring that commands flight controls, a situation that would have been “catastrophic,” including causing electrical shorts and fires. During the interview, Barnett commented:

As a quality manager at Boeing, you’re the last line of defense before a defect makes it out to the flying public. And I haven’t seen a plane out of

Charleston yet that I'd put my name on saying it's safe and airworthy.

Barnett had given many other interviews to different news outlets since then. In a lengthy interview in the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, he noted:

[Boeing management] started pressuring us to not document defects, to work outside the procedures, to allow defective material to be installed without being corrected. They started bypassing procedures and not maintaining configuration control of airplanes, not maintaining control of non-conforming parts—they just wanted to get the planes pushed out the door and make the cash register ring.

He continued:

My team and I found out that the emergency oxygen equipment—when the mask falls—we discovered that 25 percent of the oxygen systems don't work properly. In the event of a decompression event when those oxygen masks fall, 25 percent of them are not going to work. They are not going to supply oxygen.

At most altitudes, not having oxygen during a decompression event can cause passengers to suffer hypoxia, which can lead to death, in as little as 10 seconds.

What has been revealed exposes Boeing as a corporate entity solely focused on profits and recklessly negligent when it comes to the safety of human beings. The massive corporation is shielded by regulators from the FAA and the US government, which has never prosecuted a single Boeing official for the numerous and sometimes lethal problems that have emerged in the company's line of aircraft.

The most notorious are the crashes of 737 Max 8 aircraft in 2018 and 2019, which killed a total of 346 men, women and children, i.e., all of the passengers and crew on both planes. Even though it was revealed that then-CEO

Dennis Muilenberg was aware of issues in the production of the Max 8, not only was he not jailed for allowing the planes to fly, ultimately costing 346 lives, he was allowed to make more than \$80 million in salary and benefits during the years he ran the company.

Muilenberg's successor is no better. David Calhoun made nearly \$22.5 million in 2022. He was on Boeing's Board of Directors during the entire development and production of the Max aircraft and has remained CEO even as numerous problems have surfaced this year alone, showing that virtually every commercial aircraft the company produces is a potential death trap.

The ongoing crisis at Boeing, once one of the most respected and trusted producers of airplanes in the world, is a concentrated expression of the decline of American capitalism. It is a byproduct of the drive by Wall Street to maximize profits at any cost, including human lives.

At Boeing, this is manifested in the fact from 2014 to 2018, when the Max aircraft were being finalized, "Boeing diverted 92 percent of operating cash flow to dividends and share buybacks to benefit investors," according to the *Seattle Times*.

More generally, Boeing's immunity from consequences is bound up with its strategic position within US imperialism. It is a major producer of aircraft for wars abroad, including war materiel for the ongoing genocide in Gaza. It is also one of the country's largest exporters, which makes maintaining Boeing's stock price critical for Wall Street.

Barnett's lawsuit could have dealt a significant blow to these interests. There are no doubt many government officials and politicians who are breathing a sigh of relief that the whistleblower's most damning testimony will not be entered into the public record.

What his death does highlight, however, is the need to put an end to the social system that allows companies like Boeing to persist—namely, capitalism. The airline industry, like all aspects of modern life, must be placed at the service of social needs, not private profit. The working class must be mobilized to expropriate the banks and financial institutions that control these industries and run air travel on a socialist basis.



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