

# Media blackout of “suicide” of Boeing whistleblower John Barnett continues as company CEO David Calhoun steps down

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The media blackout of the supposed “suicide” of Boeing whistleblower John Barnett continues amid the announcement from the aerospace giant that its CEO, David Calhoun, will be stepping down at the end of the year.

The same announcement also revealed that Stan Deal, the head of Boeing’s commercial airplanes division, is stepping down immediately, to be replaced by Stephanie Pope, and that the chair of Boeing’s Board of Directors, Larry Kellner, will not stand for reelection. Steve Mollenkopf will act as independent board chair until a more formal vote at Boeing’s next shareholders meeting.

During his tenure, Calhoun made \$24.5 million in salary and benefits and will possibly make a further \$45.5 million from stock options he retains and \$5 million from a retirement package.

The exit of the executives takes place amid the scandal surrounding the many problems that have plagued Boeing aircraft in previous months, most notably the blowout of an exit-row door on a Boeing 737 Max 9 in January. The FBI has opened a criminal investigation into whether the blowout violates Boeing’s settlement in 2021 for misleading federal regulators about the safety of its 737 Max aircraft.

There have been numerous other incidents on Boeing aircraft in the past three months, all of which reflect the drive of the company’s executives to maximize profits for stockholders to the detriment of safety on its fleet of commercial airliners. These include:

- A cracked cockpit window on a Boeing 737–800
- An engine catching fire after takeoff on a Boeing 747–8
- A lost landing gear wheel while taxiing on a Boeing

757

- A lost landing gear wheel after takeoff on a Boeing 777–200
- A “midflight technical issue” that resulted in the sudden drop of a Boeing 787–9 Dreamliner, injuring 50 people
- A fuel leak after takeoff on a Boeing 777–300
- An exterior panel falling off after takeoff on a Boeing 737–800

What has been largely dropped, however, is the fact that Boeing is currently involved in a civil suit brought by the now deceased whistleblower John Barnett.

Barnett worked at Boeing for 32 years and was a quality manager. For most of that time he was responsible for ensuring the safety of aircraft before they were sold. During the last part of his tenure, he worked at the company’s new production facility in Charleston, South Carolina, which produces the 787 Dreamliner. There he documented “numerous ethics complaints” about a “deep-rooted and persistent culture of concealment” concerning the dangerous lack of quality control at the facility.

Barnett’s suit alleges that in response, Boeing forced him to retire 10 years earlier than he would have liked, having forced him to work in a “gray area” where he could not document defects. The whistleblower was slated to give the third day of a deposition in his suit when he was found shot in the head in his truck in a hotel parking lot on the morning of March 9.

With little investigation, the Charleston County coroner ruled that the cause of death was “a self-inflicted wound,” coinciding with a police report that found “a white piece of paper resembling a note” near Barnett’s body.

In response, Barnett's lawyers immediately released a statement contradicting the official report, declaring:

We didn't see any indication that he would take his own life. No one can believe it. The Charleston police need to investigate this fully and accurately and tell the public. No detail can be left unturned.

More explosively, a close family friend of Barnett told an ABC affiliate on March 15 that Barnett warned her, "If anything happens to me, it's not suicide."

The full 32-page complaint was released by Barnett's lawyers after his death. It reveals a culture of neglect and criminality within the company that is no doubt a major factor in the numerous problems on Boeing aircraft over the past three months.

Among the more damning claims is the assertion that Barnett and others were "pressured by Boeing upper management to violate Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Standards and Regulations." In particular, the complaint says that they were told to ignore defects on the Dreamliner, resulting in "an incomplete build record, which constitutes a criminal felony offense and has the potential to adversely impact the safety of the flying public."

That there is next to no mention of Barnett, his suit, or his death in the corporate media is by design. Boeing is already facing a public backlash from its near-catastrophes, as well as renewed focus on the deaths of 346 people on 737 Max 8 crashes in October 2018 and March 2019. Numerous memes have appeared on social media ridiculing the flight capabilities of the company's aircraft, and options to exclude flights on Boeing planes are among the most popular options on travel websites.

To acknowledge that Boeing is so concretely exposed would further undermine its already precarious position. Boeing's stock is down almost 26 percent from the beginning of the year, and the sole concern of those who own the major media outlets, many of whom have stock in Boeing, is pumping Boeing's shares back up to their December heights and beyond.

In other words, "the fix is in" for Boeing's current slate of issues. None of the multimillionaires who

oversaw and drove the systematic violation of safety standards and procedures will be held accountable. As in the past, the Republicans, the Democrats and the regulatory agencies, all of which are proxies for the corporate oligarchy, will do their best to bury the truth, regardless of the danger to human life.



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