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Title: Sr. ASI
Division: ERA

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Contact: Chris Speer, DOM Aviator College

FAA Inspector Jim Holmes and I met with the management team of Aviator College on Monday April 8, 2024. This included the Dirs. Of Safety, Ops and Maintenance, and also the Chief Flight Instructor and VP of Operations. The preliminary findings from the wreckage/engine exam were shared at this meeting, in addition to discussing how Aviator College runs their flight school both from a maintenance and operations perspective.

I spoke with the Director of Maintenance (DOM) Mr. Christopher Speer, after this meeting. Inspector Holmes was also present. Mr. Speer stated he had been with Aviator College for 17 yrs, and a mechanic for 30 yrs. He provided a tour of the maintenance hangar and demonstrated how he checks the linkages for the mixture and throttle. Mr. Speer said he became "obsessive" with checking the linkages for the throttle and mixture cables, after an incident he had while flying where he lost engine power and had to make a forced landing because the cotter pin on the throttle linkage was not secured properly.

Mr. Speer said he was the only person authorized at the flight school to endorse an airplane for an annual inspection. He endorsed the annual inspection for N595ND the day before the accident. Mr. Speer was asked if he checked the security of the right engine carburetor's throttle arm, and he said, "I must have" because that is "what I always do." Mr. Speer was shown pictures of the accident throttle arm from the accident airplane. He acknowledged the damage to the spline interface could result in the gears skipping and a pilot being unable to advance power on the engine. He stated that he did not know how he could have missed it in his inspection. Mr. Speer was also shown photos of two spark plugs from the right engine that were found

clearly not gapped correctly. He acknowledged that the plugs condition was not optimal and said that the mechanic that assisted with the annual inspection should have thrown them out when they were inspected.

Mr. Speer was very emotional. He mentioned that they were short-staffed and the mechanics working for him were not experienced. Mr. Speer said that he tried to quit a week before the accident. There was a lot of pressure on him from management to get airplanes out of maintenance and back on the flight line. Mr. Speer mentioned that a previously employed mechanic (who had recently been fired) had conducted questionable maintenance to several airplanes in the fleet. Mr. Speer said he grounded those airplanes because he needed to check all of them for potential problems. He said that he did not have the time or manpower available to get those airplanes inspected and also conduct the regular 100 hr. and annual inspections to the non-grounded airplanes. Mr. Speer said that most airplanes in the school reach 100 hrs. in about 2 weeks. Mr. Speer said that when he tried to quit, the school pleaded with him to stay, and he did. He wanted to quit because of the pressure and that was being placed on him. He told them it was too much and that something was going to get missed and someone was going to get killed.

Aviator College also owns and operates an A&P school, of which Mr. Speer is also the Director. Mr. Speer said he spends most of his time at the flight school.

Mr. Speer exhibited quite a bit of sorrow regarding the accident, and he accepted that he possibly had a role in the accident. He was eager to take suggestions to improve the quality of maintenance at Aviator College and has since implemented a required inspection item (RII) program. He provided a letter to the FAA and NTSB describing the program and also several other changes they made to improve safety.