

Closing Statement

In closing, I would like to recognize the hard work of the NTSB staff in this investigation. I also want to thank my colleagues for the good discussion and debate.

In the first accident investigation courses I took nearly 30 years ago, the instructor told us that “an accident is an opportunity.” By that, of course, he meant that if an investigation is conducted properly, we have the opportunity to identify factors that can be corrected to improve safety. But, as in the case of this tragedy at Lockhart, often that opportunity comes at a terrible price.

This pilot should not have been flying – never mind carrying paying passengers. The pilot’s poor decisions on the day of the accident were his and his alone, but they affected those who flew with him. Other decisions made within government, dating back decades, exempted him from having to hold an FAA medical certificate.

Today’s recommendations, if acted on, will help to bring the safety standards and oversight of commercial passenger carrying balloon operations closer to those that apply to powered flight.

Balloon pilots, their passengers, and their passengers’ loved ones, deserve no less.

Thank you, and we stand adjourned.

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