

Boeing Executive in Charge of 737 MAX Legal Response Has Been Fired

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Boeing shareholders just can't catch a break.

Barely three days after now-former Boeing CEO Dennis Muilenburg's termination at the hands of the company's board of directors, another top-ranking company official has retired been pushed out.

According to a [press release published shortly after American markets closed on Thursday](#), Boeing revealed that the company's top legal official, former federal judge J Michael Luttig, has decided to "retire" after just over six months in a position that was created by Muilenburg specifically for Luttig.

Here's more from [the press release](#):

The Boeing Company announced today that J. Michael Luttig, 65, valued Counselor and Senior Advisor to the Boeing Board of Directors, has informed the Board of his long-considered retirement at year end.

Luttig, who served as Boeing's General Counsel from 2006 until assuming his current responsibilities in May 2019, has been managing legal matters associated with the Lion Air Flight 610 and Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 accidents, and advising the Board on strategic matters.

Boeing interim President and CEO Greg Smith praised Luttig in a quote included with Boeing's press release.

"Judge Luttig is one of the finest legal minds in the Nation and he has expertly and tirelessly guided our company as General Counsel, Counselor, and Senior Advisor," said Interim Boeing President and CEO Greg Smith. "We are deeply indebted to Judge Luttig for his extraordinary service to Boeing over these nearly 14 years, especially through this past, challenging year for our company," said Smith. "The Board and I will always be grateful for the Judge's remarkable service to The Boeing Company - and I will personally always be grateful for his friendship."

According to [the Seattle Times](#), during his brief tenure at Boeing, Luttig assembled a deeply connected defense team of outside lawyers to represent Boeing executives and employees in a criminal investigation launched by federal authorities after the second 737 MAX crash, which occurred just minutes after a Ethiopian Airlines flight 302 took off from Addis Ababa Bole International Airport on March 10, 2019.

Luttig's appointment signaled that Boeing was planning to aggressively combat any criminal charges or civil lawsuits tied to the two 737 crashes, which killed 346 people, including all of the passengers and crew.

Luttig was named to the newly created position in May, as the Chicago-based company faced an onslaught of lawsuits and a federal criminal investigation arising from the crashes. Until then, Luttig had served as Boeing's general counsel since 2006.

His duties regarding the 737 MAX will now fall to Brett Gerry, who replaced Luttig as general counsel.

Luttig's appointment to the new position last spring reflected the complex and costly fallout stemming from the crashes, coming on the heels of statements indicating Boeing planned to take an aggressive stance in responding to lawsuits and any potential criminal allegations

The Department of Justice, aided by the Department of Transportation's Inspector General and the FBI, is investigating the design and certification process for the MAX to try and determine whether the FAA's decision to certify the 737 MAX 8 amounted to criminal negligence.

It's possible that Luttig's departure is simply a natural consequence of Muilenburg's ouster. It's also possible that his departure is tied to recent revelations that Boeing [withheld critical internal text messages](#) from the FAA.

Still, given Luttig's crucial role within Boeing's legal department, something about the timing of Luttig's departure doesn't sit right. And with Boeing shares on track to finish the year above the 2019 lows reached in March, we imagine shareholders will soon be asking themselves: 'what does this guy know that I don't?'

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