By Capt. Duane Woerth, ALPA President

“Tired of Fatigue

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These powerful words came in response to a key part of testimony on the Age 60 Rule that I recently delivered to a Senate committee. Whatever your opinion on Age 60, we all know what a toll fatigue is taking on our profession. Here is what I said that prompted Sen. Stevens’ commitment to ALPA:

“Now is the time to take this issue to a higher level, and that means Congress. I’d be very pleased to work with you on pilot fatigue issues to see if we can’t get someone to take a good long look at that. Pilot fatigue is, in my opinion, more dangerous to any passenger than age is.”—Sen. Ted Stevens (R-Alaska)

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16 hours is the de facto limit because of the requirement for a look-back rest of 8 hours.

• Minimum rest of 10 hours, preferably at a hotel. With the current 8-hour reduced rest, a pilot may get as little as 5 hours of sleep, once travel to and from a hotel, meals, and physiological needs are factored in.

• Address circadian rhythm issues. Back-side-of-the-clock operations pose significant fatigue issues. To address them, we could reduce duty times, limit takeoffs and landings, and credit deadhead time as duty time. Right now, a crew can deadhead from Chicago to Hawaii and then be assigned duty to fly the aircraft back to Chicago with no rest. That must change.

ALPA also submitted the above recommendations to the FAA long ago, but the FAA failed to address our issues. Over the years, the FAA has taken many half-hearted steps to paper over flight and duty time issues, including publishing a notice of proposed rulemaking in 1995, a notice that remains in limbo. Numerous FAA Aviation Rulemaking Advisory Committee working groups have worked on the issue and have concluded without resolution.

Now is the time to take this issue to a higher level, and that means Congress. I will soon follow up with key members of Congress to make sure that they know how tired we are of being tired.