

ORAL TESTIMONY OF  
CAPTAIN JOHN PRATER, PRESIDENT  
AIR LINE PILOTS ASSOCIATION, INTERNATIONAL

BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION  
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JUNE 11, 2009

REGIONAL AIR CARRIERS AND PILOT WORKFORCE ISSUES

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to discuss some of the critical issues affecting pilots in the regional sector of the industry. We commend Congress for recognizing the importance of these issues and look forward to participating in the FAA "Call to Action" summit next week to address them further. While this summit is a good start, these issues are complex and long-term solutions need to be identified, and we encourage your continued attention to the recommendations we make here today.

In recent years, the major airlines have come to rely heavily on codeshare arrangements with regional airlines to serve midsize and smaller cities in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. This has resulted in the exponential growth of the regional sector of the industry.

Still, the major carriers exert a great deal of economic pressures on the regional airlines to provide their service at the lowest possible price. They control ticket pricing and schedules, and regularly move flying between their regional partners. Some majors have even begun outsourcing their flying to regionals and laying off their own pilots with decades of experience in the process.

These experienced pilots cannot afford to work for a regional as a newly hired first officer. As a result, many of the smaller regional carriers hire pilots at the FAA minimum standards and do not employ screening processes during hiring that identify the “ideal” candidate.

As was brought out during the NTSB’s recent hearing on the tragic accident in Buffalo, many pilots who fly for regional airlines aren’t getting adequate training or enough rest. Airlines are requiring pilots to work longer days and more of them each month. Fleet and base changes are forcing pilots to decide between commuting and possibly taking a pay cut to train on new equipment. The consequence: the quality of airline pilot “careers” has been greatly diminished and severe erosion of benefits and quality of life are motivating pilots to move to other professions.

Current training practices do not take into account changing airline pilot demographics. Instead, they assume that pilots are far more experienced than they may actually be. ALPA believes there must be a new focus on standardization and even some fundamental flying skills. To meet this challenge, airlines and other training providers must develop methodologies to “train experience and judgment.” Current training practices may also need to be adjusted to account for the source and experience level of the pilot entering initial training at the airline.

ALPA also believes there should be more stringent academic requirements to obtain both commercial and airline transport pilot ratings in preparation for a career as an airline pilot.

The FAA should develop and implement a structured and rigorous ground school and testing process for pilots who want to qualify to fly for Part 121 airlines.

ALPA also recommends that airlines provide specific command and leadership training courses for new captains to instill in them the necessary skills and traits to be a *real* leader on the flight deck.

Airlines should also implement mentoring programs for both captains and first officers as they first enter operations in their crew positions to help them apply their knowledge and skills to line operations and supplement their own limited experience by learning from their peers.

Flight experience and pilot capabilities cannot be measured by mere flight hours. Screening processes should be established prior to initial pilot hiring to ensure that new-hire airline pilots are indeed the best and the brightest as far as abilities, airmanship, professionalism, and performance.

Turning to another area of concern, fatigue has reached alarming levels within the industry. ALPA has long advocated changes to flight and duty time rules for commercial aviation operations, and we join the NTSB in calling for revisions that are based on readily available science.

**We have talked long enough. It is time to implement these science-based regulatory changes.**

Other means to enhance safety and improve airline operations are data collection and analysis programs such as FOQA and ASAP which provide important and needed safety information, not only internally within air carriers, but also for the overall air transportation system.

In order to allow these programs to grow and make the reports more readily obtainable, additional legislative protections need to be put in place that will limit the data use in civil liability cases.

Restrictions also need to be strengthened to ensure the data is used for safety purposes only.

Many major carriers have implemented these programs and follow other best practices which should also be undertaken by their codeshare partners. ALPA joins with the NTSB in calling upon major airlines and their code-sharing partners to establish a

program of operational oversight that includes periodic safety audits of flight operations, training programs, and maintenance and inspection, as well as emphasize the exchange of information and resources to enhance the safety of flight operations.

The best safety device on any airplane is a well-trained, well-rested, highly motivated pilot. A strong safety culture must be instilled and consistently reinforced from the highest levels within an airline *and* among its codeshare partners. This type of organizational safety culture will encourage the highest levels of performance among professional pilots, improve airline operations, and, most importantly, advance aviation safety.

Thank you.