

STATEMENT OF CAPT. JOHN PRATER
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BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

WASHINGTON, D.C.
February 10, 2009

FAA Reauthorization Act of 2009

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and distinguished Subcommittee members.

When passed, the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2009 should make significant strides in advancing aviation safety and herald a new era for U.S. air transportation.

I will outline six priority safety and policy areas for the Air Line Pilots Association, International. Several are covered in the last Congress's reauthorization bill. However, a number of critical concerns have not yet been addressed.

First, no industry was hit harder by the 9/11 attacks than the U.S. airlines. To keep our companies in business, our pilots took enormous concessions. As a result, our members often fly right up to the regulatory limits for flight and duty time.

Sixteen-hour domestic duty days--and longer in international flying--are a fact of life for pilots. Irregular shifts, multiple time zones, all-night operations, and disrupted circadian rhythms all contribute to pilot fatigue. The eight-hour rest period in the current regulations includes travel to and from the hotel, and pilots often cannot get time--or decompress enough--to receive more than five or six hours of sleep.

ALPA advocates a complete overhaul of the regulations based on modern science. The rules must apply to all sizes of both passenger and all-cargo operations. They must encompass adequate rest periods, reasonable duty periods, and provisions for crossing multiple time zones and flying on the “back side of the clock.”

ALPA strongly supports bill language that directs the FAA to commission a National Academy of Sciences study to collect new data on pilot fatigue and to use it to update the regulations.

Second, fostering a safe air transportation system also requires a foundation of voluntary, non-punitive safety reporting programs.

These programs must be based on an unshakable sense of trust among the participants. Most reports are “sole source,” meaning only the person reporting knew that a mistake occurred. Without full confidence that reporting an error will be used solely to advance safety, employees will have little incentive to come forward, and valuable safety data will be lost. Moreover, Safety Management Systems will be stymied without them.

Programs have been suspended because of misused reports. We ask Congress to protect voluntarily supplied safety information against misuse for discipline, FAA sanction, or litigation.

Third, few deny the need to modernize the nation’s airspace. It is a priority for ALPA. Infrastructure, equipment, and facilities are severely outdated. Modernization is a complex, expensive, and long-term endeavor that must be done right the first time. Long-term, stable funding is essential.

Airlines currently pay the majority of costs for operating the national airspace system. All users will benefit from a safe, modern system. All should bear a fair share of the costs.

A related airspace management concern for pilots is unmanned aerial systems. Regulations must ensure safety before these aircraft can share airspace with airliners.

ALPA pilots hail provisions in the bill to enhance runway safety, research wake turbulence, icing, and other weather impacts on airline operations, and continue to operate Midway Island airfield as a trans-pacific emergency landing option. The Wake Island airfield must also be included.

We commend your efforts to establish oversight requirements for airlines using non-certificated maintenance facilities. We also note two areas that warrant additional support—research to reduce volcanic ash and wildlife hazards.

Fourth, many all-cargo aircraft operate without flight deck doors--a critical layer of safety for pilots who, along with cargo, often fly animal handlers and couriers vetted using only limited ground security procedures. All FAR Part 121 operations must be afforded one standard of safety and security. We call on Congress to ensure that all-cargo aircraft can be equipped with reinforced flightdeck doors or an equivalent level of protection.

Fifth, ALPA also strongly backs language in the bill affirming that U.S. citizens must control key operational aspects of U.S. airlines. This bill does that by identifying fleet composition, route selection, pricing, and labor relations as among the operational elements that the Department of Transportation must ensure U.S. citizens control.

Finally, our industry's financial health is extremely important to pilots. Large jet fuel price spikes and scarcity pose the greatest threat. ALPA urges Congress to swiftly adopt a national energy policy that will increase jet fuel supply, reduce rampant oil

investor speculation, and hold the line on new fuel taxes, charges, or fees.

This FAA reauthorization bill holds promise for powerful change. As the professionals who make the airline industry work every day and every night of the year, *we* what works and what doesn't. When in doubt, please ask *us*.

Thank you for doing just that by having us here today.