

ORAL TESTIMONY OF
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AIR LINE PILOTS ASSOCIATION, INTERNATIONAL

BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

US AIRWAYS FLIGHT 1549 ACCIDENT
FEBRUARY 24, 2009

Good morning, and thank you for inviting ALPA to testify before this committee. Before I begin my remarks, I want to express our heartfelt sympathies to the families and friends of those lost in the Continental Connection Flight 3407 accident. It is ALPA's privilege to support them in their time of need.

Over the span of 78 years, ALPA has been a part of nearly every significant safety and security improvement in the airline industry. Today, we run the largest non-governmental aviation safety organization in the world, powered by hundreds of professional airline pilots.

This morning, we'll explore the various safety issues associated with this accident, including the value of having well-trained professional men and women in the front seats of our airliners. It is clear that Capt. Sullenberger dedicates his professional life to improving aviation safety, and we're proud to say that ALPA provided him with that safety structure for more than 20 years.

Year after year, pilots who have performed routinely under critical conditions deflect the praise, just as the crew of US Airways Flight 1549 did. We call it "doing our jobs." But this crew provided the aviation industry with the *extraordinarily rare opportunity* to analyze a relatively intact airliner that not only successfully landed on water but also retained enough structural integrity to give all the occupants time to evacuate safely. We must learn everything we can from this ditching.

ALPA urges the FAA, working with the NTSB investigation, to conduct a thorough analysis of the requirements for, and capabilities of, the various water-survival provisions on airliners—from life jackets, which some airlines are removing, to landing in bodies of water other than the ocean, such as the Hudson River.

As for the birds, you have to understand that the potential for bird strikes is something that every pilot is aware of, concerned about, and generally powerless to avoid—especially when faced with an entire flock of Canada geese on takeoff. Aircraft manufacturers have made great strides in designing airplanes to withstand bird strikes.

Pilots train for wildlife avoidance. Airport operators administer Wildlife Hazard Management Plans and are testing new technologies that the FAA will develop into an

airport bird strike advisory system. We're doing our part, too, by furthering our pilots' training with educational materials about wildlife avoidance techniques. In fact, we're releasing a publication today which makes a number of recommendations on this issue.

In the end, however, the most important safety issue that emerged from this accident involves the human element—not the birds, or the airplane. After both engines failed, Capt. Sullenberger, First Officer Skiles, and the flight attendants used their training and worked as a team to make split-second life-or-death decisions that literally determined the fate of 155 souls.

First Officers Derek Alter with Colgan Air and Susan O'Donnell with American Airlines, both jump seating on this flight, also assisted in the evacuation—Derek even gave a passenger the shirt off of his back. The air traffic

controllers calmly described the pilots' emergency landing options at various local airports. The ferry boat pilots' and first responders' swift reaction enabled an almost immediate rescue from the frigid waters.

The truth is that these individuals do this job day-in and day-out, 24-7, 365 days of the year—often without recognition. Capt. Sullenberger told Katie Couric that the most important words he's heard have been from his peers. He said, "That I have made them proud. That they feel pride in themselves—a pride in their profession they hadn't felt for years. Sometimes decades."

His words really stuck with me. See, we know that many of our airline pilots have lost pensions, wages, and medical benefits over the past 8 years. Furloughs, bankruptcies, and near bankruptcies further damaged many of our contracts. I know the toll it has taken on our

pilots...and on the future of our industry...and on its safety and security...and so does Sully.

What troubles us most is that these conditions have eroded the piloting profession to the point where our union has raised legitimate questions about whether the industry is capable of hiring and retaining the next Capt.

Sullenberger.

While the traveling public might appreciate cheap fares in a downturn economy, they need to know it comes with the hidden fees of losing quality pilots and making it nearly impossible to attract the next generation of pilots to fill the shoes of the crewmembers before them.

The bottom line is that airline safety depends on many variables, but ultimately a passenger's life is in the hands of a highly qualified, trained, and experienced flight crew and

their ability to handle the unexpected. We need to recruit some good sticks.

Most pilots can pinpoint the moment when they fell in love with flying. There's no doubt in my mind that Capt. Sullenberger and his crew inspired thousands of boys and girls out there to become airline pilots.

As the president of the largest pilots union in the world, I want to ensure that these kids have the opportunity to follow in Sully's footsteps, and do what they love for a decent living. As professional aviators who help keep this industry safe, together with the strong support of Congress, we are confident that we can turn their dreams into reality. Our success in this mission is vital to our nation, our industry, and the safety of the traveling public.

Thank you.