Dear Colleague:

We write to urge you to join the letter below to House and Senate Leadership urging an extension of a vital worker relief program that will keep airline workers employed through next year as the airline industry and our larger economy continue to be ravaged by the insidious pandemic of COVID-19.

In March, as U.S. COVID-19 cases began rising exponentially, Congress rose to the occasion by enacting the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act, Pub. L. No. 116-136) to provide assistance to tens of millions of Americans who found their financial security, if not their health, directly imperiled by the pandemic. Among other things, the CARES Act created the novel Payroll Support Program (PSP), under which the Treasury Secretary issued $32 billion in grants to airlines and their contractors exclusively to keep their workers on the payroll through September 30, 2020. These grants—essentially payments to workers, passed through their employers—have kept nearly 1 million airline industry workers on the payroll and off unemployment lines.

But while time marches on, so does the pandemic, with hardly any green shoots sprouting for the airlines as they continue to face the worst crisis by far in the industry’s history. Last Wednesday, a major airline put 36,000 workers across the country on notice that they could be furloughed on or after October 1. Other carriers have issued and will issue similar notices.

In anticipation of negotiations with the Senate on COVID-19 relief legislation, an extension of the extremely successful PSP, which saved nearly 1 million jobs, must be on the table. Of the many worker-programs included in the CARES Act that will be debated in the weeks ahead, the PSP has arguably been the most effective. The PSP is a jobs program. Its direct payroll pass-through saved hundreds of thousands of aviation jobs—and not a penny went to enrich the airlines themselves or their shareholders. Even Treasury Secretary Mnuchin has commented on how the PSP has been “critical to supporting American workers and preserving our airline industry.” According to Secretary Mnuchin’s own calculations, taxpayers realized a 70 percent return just from payroll and income tax receipts and reduced
unemployment insurance payments. Other sizable government savings, made possible by keeping tens of thousands of airline workers employed, include those to Medicaid and state unemployment programs.

When we passed the CARES Act in March, there was an expectation that we would see a significant recovery in U.S. aviation by the fall. This is no longer the case. With the current resurgence of COVID-19 in several States across the country and a vaccine for the virus yet to be developed, passenger demand for air travel will not recover before the PSP expires on September 30. **And without an extension of the PSP before then, hundreds of thousands of airline workers may be fired or furloughed starting October 1.** We must extend the PSP as soon as possible.

Please join us in sending a letter to House and Senate Leadership urging them to extend the PSP authorities in the CARES Act through March 31, 2021, and save hundreds of thousands of frontline airline workers’ jobs. See the text of the sign-on letter below.

If you wish to sign on, please contact Cheniqua Johnson with the Subcommittee on Aviation by July 21, 2020, at Cheniqua.Johnson@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,

PETER A. DeFAZIO RICK LARSEN
Chair, Committee on Transportation Chair, Subcommittee on Aviation and Infrastructure

SHARICE L. DAVIDS RODNEY DAVIS
Vice Chair, Subcommittee on Aviation Member of Congress

KAREN BASS JOHN KATKO
Member of Congress Member of Congress

BRIAN FITZPATRICK
Member of Congress

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July __, 2020
Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy, and Leader Schumer:

As you enter into negotiations regarding legislation to further address the public health and economic crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we write to urge you to extend the extremely successful Payroll Support Program (PSP) included in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act, Pub. L. No. 116-136), which saved the jobs of 950,000 of frontline airline industry workers such as mechanics, baggage handlers, gate agents, catering workers, flight attendants, and pilots, among others. Roughly 750,000 of these women and men work directly for airlines, and at least 200,000 work for airline contractors and clean cabins, prepare meals, and handle baggage, among other things.

The PSP—a novel program in which the government effectively passes paychecks to airline industry workers through their employers—will keep workers on the payrolls and off unemployment lines through September 30, 2020. But while time marches on, so does the pandemic, with hardly any green shoots sprouting for the airlines as they continue to face the worst crisis by far in the industry’s history. Last Wednesday, a major airline put 36,000 workers across the country on notice that they could be furloughed on or after October 1. Other carriers have issued and will issue similar notices.

According to the most recent airline traffic data, U.S. air carriers reported a 96 percent drop in passenger traffic for April 2020 over April 2019. And so far in July, total traveler throughput at Transportation Security Administration checkpoints dropped by, on average, more than 70 percent compared to the same period in 2019. Without further relief from Congress, mass layoffs among airline
industry workers are inevitable—and their magnitude will eclipse those of any furloughs the industry has ever seen.

The PSP’s payroll pass-through saved hundreds of thousands of frontline airline workers’ jobs—and not a penny went to the airlines themselves or their shareholders. According to Secretary Mnuchin’s own calculations, taxpayers realized a 70 percent return just from payroll and income tax receipts and reduced unemployment insurance payments. Other sizable government savings, made possible by keeping tens of thousands of airline workers employed, include those to Medicaid and state unemployment programs.

With the resurgence of COVID-19 in several States across the country and a vaccine for the virus yet to be developed, passenger demand for air travel will not recover before the PSP expires on September 30. **And without an extension of the PSP before then, hundreds of thousands of airline workers will be fired or furloughed on October 1.** To save nearly one million airline industry jobs, we must extend the PSP through March 31, 2021.

Thank you for your attention to this extremely important matter that will save jobs and ensure the U.S. airline system remains viable as a national security asset and engine of economic recovery once the pandemic is finally behind us.

Sincerely,
