

Departures

Opinions On Current Issues In Aviation

Pilots Are More Than Ready

CAPT. JOSEPH G. DEPETE, PRESIDENT, AIR LINE PILOTS ASSOCIATION, INT'L

Thanks to a historic government-labor-airlines partnership, forged during an unprecedented global pandemic, airline pilots are more than ready to safely get passengers to their destinations this holiday season.

With continued government leadership and strong union advocacy, we can ensure the United States has even more trained-for-life pilots in the future.

Over the past 20 months, the bipartisan Payroll Support Program (PSP) has averted disaster for the airline industry and its workers. Because of the \$63 billion in federal relief—as well as aviation workers who volunteered to retire early—our industry was ready for Thanksgiving, with many carriers marking their best on-time performance since 2017. This is exactly what the law was intended to do—keep workers on the payroll and critical infrastructure intact so that we could meet demand once passengers began flying again.

Because of the PSP, airline pilots are helping our industry meet current demand, and the Air Line Pilots Association is committed to helping ensure that the United States has even more qualified and diverse aviators in the years ahead. Unfortunately, not everyone has an equitable path to becoming an airline pilot. Women and people of color face barriers to becoming aviators—and that must change.

The United States can foster a strong and diverse pilot workforce for the future by investing in the pilot pipeline now. The U.S. government can align federal funding for pilot academic education and training with that of other highly skilled professions. It can provide federal financial assistance for flight training for students pursuing two- and four-year degrees and allow pilots to work for airlines that serve the public need in exchange for student loan forgiveness. The government can also increase subsidized loans for flight training and ensure that unsubsidized loans do not accrue interest while students are in school.

In addition, the government can provide grants to minority-serving educational institutions to start or expand aviation and flight degree programs and help other schools that serve underrepresented communities create such programs. Because students who graduate from a certified

two- or four-year aviation program obtain the license needed to become an airline pilot with fewer than the 1,500 hours of experience required for others, this investment will also help students.

Our industry should also address economic and work-life disincentives experienced by pilots at regional airlines, which is where pilots often find their first job. In addition, the United States must insist on an inclusive workplace for airline pilots. For example, while pilots have historically been referred to only as “he,” ALPA uses gender-inclusive language in its governing documents and is working to

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record. Today, U.S. air transportation is the safest in the world—a fact attributable to factors including our having two qualified pilots on every flight deck, maintaining first officer qualification and experience regulations, and conducting efficient and rigorous pilot training developed collaboratively by the regulator, airlines, and labor. Rather than acceding to suggestions by a few to roll back pilot qualification standards or weaken crew complement requirements that have kept flying safe, we must open doors of opportunity and double down on safety.

The U.S. airline industry is alive and well—and looking to grow. Thanks to federal relief, airline pilots are more than ready to deliver for our customers. With U.S. government leadership, we can also ensure that a strong and diverse pilot workforce is ready for takeoff in the future.

incorporate inclusive language in its collective bargaining agreements.

As the United States works to expand and diversify our pilot workforce, we must also protect our industry’s extraordinary safety

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