

Capt. Joe DePete, ALPA President
Address before the Aero Club of Washington
Monday, June 28, 2021

“Cultivating a Strong, Safe, and Diverse Airline Pilot Workforce”

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Thank you for the invitation and the kind introduction, Melissa. I am very pleased to speak here today before the Aero Club of Washington.

ALPA is proud to support the Aero Club Foundation, and we add our warm congratulations to the scholarship winners including Kieri and Dieudonne!

What a year and a half it has been! And before I go any further, I would like to take a moment to thank everyone at this virtual luncheon and those in the aviation and aerospace community who are not able to join us here today. Thank you for your partnership during one of the most difficult periods in our industry’s history. Thank you for pulling together to ensure we will all come out the other side stronger and more resilient.

I am immensely proud of the work we did together. And I am proud of the critical role that frontline aviation workers played in getting us to where we are today.

Across the country and at every economic level, our response to the COVID-19 pandemic has proven a historic example of the power of American labor.

In the airline industry, U.S. aviation workers have demonstrated our power and commitment to lift the nation and carry the American people through a crisis unlike any other. And I shudder to think how much worse the COVID-19 crisis would have been without a functioning aviation industry.

When the pandemic struck, aviation workers immediately put our shoulders to the wheel to assume an essential role in driving the public-health response.

We transported medical personnel, supplies, and vaccines to where they were most needed. Airline pilots flew day and night to keep global supply chains open and goods moving to hospitals and homes.

We transported American-made products across the country and around the globe.

Like so many others during the pandemic, airline pilots often risked their own health and that of their families each time they went to work. Some pilots even had to endure forced quarantine, sometimes for weeks on end, in foreign, state-run, makeshift medical camps.

As the United States faced the challenges of COVID-19, aviation labor took its place as full and equal partners in the U.S. airline industry.

Looking back now, it is undeniable that workers led an effort that would showcase, on a historic scale, how the U.S. airline industry could marshal its enormous resources to combat the spread of the pandemic, support the treatment of those affected, and weather the devastating economic storm that came with it.

As the economic toll of the pandemic became clear, ALPA focused on protecting the U.S. airline industry as a critical component of this nation's infrastructure. To do it, we knew we needed to preserve pilot jobs in the short term so that the United States would have a strong workforce ready to fuel the rebound we hoped was not too far away.

And let me make this crystal clear right up front: ALPA pilots are trained for life and ready for takeoff. This nation's pilots are not missing a single beat when it comes to safely transporting people and goods around the globe.

We approached the challenge we faced last year by coming to the negotiating table to help our airlines survive, stabilize, and gain strength to sustain a strong return to air travel.

At the individual airline level, ALPA's pilot groups have negotiated 133 collective agreements with their airlines in the United States and Canada since March 2020 to help their companies and workers ride out the crisis. In addition, more than 2,000 ALPA pilots volunteered to end their careers early to help their colleagues and their companies withstand the financial fallout from the drop in demand.

Nationally, airline pilots joined forces with other aviation frontline workers and our airlines to call for U.S. government relief that would provide a vital bridge for employees through the worst of the pandemic. A major goal was to ensure the United States would have airline pilots at-the-ready to fuel the economic rebound we hoped would soon gain traction.

This nation's airline pilot labor force leaned in...and we leaned in with all our might. On Capitol Hill, we explained to lawmakers from both sides of the political aisle that bringing furloughed pilots back to work would not be as simple as flipping a switch. For the United States to be ready to capitalize on recovery, the nation would need a U.S. pilot workforce trained and ready for takeoff.

As a result of the power of this labor-management coalition, the U.S. airline industry obtained a total of \$63 billion in pandemic relief through the Payroll Support Program. This includes the \$15 billion contained in the American Rescue Plan, which extends the program through September 30. The PSP is one of the most pro-labor, job-saving programs in U.S. government history.

Because of labor's partnership with our airlines during the crisis and the commitment of the Administration and Congress, the Payroll Support Program is a resounding success. As we meet during this virtual luncheon, thousands of airline pilots are trained and back on the flight deck, safely operating

an increasing number of flights every day and every night, in what we hope is the first phase of a strong recovery.

Make no mistake, our nation's airline pilot workforce is ready for duty and already on the job. In fact, we are more than ready. And ALPA will not tolerate any bid to shortcut safety, propped up by false claims about pilot availability.

It is also important to remember that airline pilots helped lead the efforts to ensure a healthy flying environment for our crews and our passengers.

We were among the first to call for a mask requirement during air travel, and we pushed back vigorously when those with the authority to implement the CDC guidelines failed to do so.

All these actions, made possible by U.S. workers, have positioned the United States for a strong recovery. We are already witnessing the results in what is happening on the leisure side, and ALPA continues to press to safely reopen air travel around the world as quickly as possible.

As we do so, our industry must continue to advance safety in air travel by meeting real-time threats, including troubling incidents involving unruly and disruptive passengers. ALPA urges the U.S. government to add criminal penalties for those who are disruptive in flight and deliver on the congressional mandate to install secondary barriers to protect the flight deck on all newly manufactured aircraft.

We are also calling for U.S. lawmakers to require the retrofit of all existing passenger aircraft with secondary flight deck barriers. As Capt. Sully Sullenberger, who has been nominated by President Biden

to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to ICAO, said recently, and I quote, “In light of the huge surge in dangerous behavior on airlines, we need secondary barriers to protect the cockpit now.”

I could not agree more. When it comes to protecting the flying public and keeping people safe on board an airliner, few have more credibility than Capt. Sullenberger. I urge the FAA to stop stalling and issue the secondary barrier rule now.

ALPA is no less committed to seeing that all-cargo aircraft are equipped with hardened, intrusion-resistant flight deck doors.

We know the potential security threat posed by animal handlers and other individuals who often accompany air cargo. From my decades of experience as a cargo pilot, I can tell you that equipping all-cargo aircraft with hardened flight deck doors cannot be done quickly enough.

While our union has spared no effort in responding to the pandemic, its effect has not distracted us from our long-held principles. ALPA pilots and the highly unionized aviation workforce have helped the United States earn our position as the world leader in aviation. The risk-based, data-driven safety culture that pilots have helped create across the industry and on every flight is a key reason why U.S. air transportation is so safe.

Another of ALPA’s long-held principles is our commitment to protecting the environment. We are working to further reduce aircraft emissions and build on the actions our industry is already taking to address climate change. As a member of the NextGen Advisory Committee, I have argued for the government’s full funding of NextGen as a critical element in creating a greener airline industry.

In the context of the increasing momentum of our industry’s recovery, we also need financial backing for aviation infrastructure improvements to safely increase capacity. These measures and others will also help

make certain that new and expanding airspace users, such as remotely piloted aircraft systems and commercial spaceflight operations, are fully integrated, rather than merely accommodated, and maintain our current level of airspace safety.

Airline pilots and aviation workers never forget that the current level of safety in U.S. air transportation, as extraordinary as it is, cannot mean that we do not work harder and do more. ALPA's more than 425 pilot volunteers and our professional staff, who are engaged in nearly every aspect of aviation safety, security, pilot assistance, and jumpseat access, make certain that we never do.

So what does the aviation workforce of the future look like? We know from experience that the pilots who work on board every airliner to ensure safety must be fully qualified, trained, and rested.

In addition, we know our industry must find new ways to ensure the piloting profession attracts individuals irrespective of race, gender, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, or other diversity traits. To accomplish this and do even more, here is ALPA's view from the flight deck.

First, we need to maintain and update our regulatory standards so that the U.S. aviation industry continues to set the bar for the world. We need to focus not on lowering U.S. standards, but on raising the world's, in every area including pilot qualification, experience, and training, as well as protecting all airline pilots from fatigue.

Some suggest the opposite: that the United States should move backward and signal to the world that lower qualification, training, and experience standards are okay. That is unacceptable.

The United States did not create the safest air transportation system by moving backward.

We created it by always moving forward, always improving, and always doing better.

We are focused on creating skilled aviators, not systems operators who are along for the ride.

While the U.S. government and aviation industry stand behind building the strongest possible U.S. pilot workforce, a few outliers would cut pilot training, increase reliance on automation, and reduce crews of at least two pilots on board the flight deck who we know, based on data and experience, are essential to safety.

This misguided mentality must be categorically rejected if we are to successfully recruit the next generation of airline pilots and keep the U.S. air transportation system safe.

Because of current first officer qualification, training, and experience requirements and the work of the Commercial Aviation Safety Team, we now have a proactive, risk-based safety culture in aviation. As a result, we are enjoying the safest period in U.S. aviation history, but we can and must do more to advance safety, and especially to address known safety gaps.

This is why ALPA continues our push for regulatory action to apply science-based flight, duty, and rest requirements to all-cargo operations, as they currently STILL only apply to passenger operations.

It is time for Congress to pass the Safe Skies Act of 2021 and close this known safety gap as well as ensure one level of safety for all airline operations.

To ensure a strong pilot workforce, the second action we need to take is to make certain U.S. pilots and U.S. airlines receive a fair opportunity to compete internationally and that foreign airlines with antiworker practices are not permitted to serve the United States.

Today, atypical and flag-of-convenience business models are among the most dangerous antiworker efforts in aviation.

In a flag-of-convenience business model, an airline establishes parts of its business in different countries to “shop” for lenient labor, tax, and regulatory laws.

The result puts U.S. airlines at a competitive disadvantage and affects every U.S. pilot...including those who fly domestically for mainline or fee-for-departure airlines, as most U.S. international passengers connect at least once.

While the effect on U.S. workers’ rights is clear, equally important, these antiworker practices by some foreign airlines also pose a threat to a proactive safety culture because pilots may not have direct access to their employer to report safety issues or worse yet, may not have confidence in a nonpunitive reporting environment, which is key to maintaining a high level of safety.

Due to this serious threat, ALPA fully supports the newly introduced Fair and Open Skies Act of 2021, which fully and more clearly enables the Department of Transportation (DOT) to protect labor from unfair business practices by foreign airlines that seek to receive foreign air carrier permits.

Relatedly, ALPA is urging the DOT to ensure that EU airlines abide by the U.S.-EU agreement and its labor clause, as well as work with the Department of State to elevate labor rights as an essential policy element in negotiating future agreements. We are also calling for increased DOT scrutiny and oversight of existing and proposed joint ventures to ensure that U.S. labor will benefit from growth in international markets.

Third, we need to do more to ensure that U.S. workers are free to exercise their right to organize. ALPA celebrates our 90th anniversary in July. The many antiworker business practices pilots endured during the early days of flight was the reason our union was founded.

Even today, such practices persist and undermine the dignity of work, jeopardizing workers' contribution to safety, while threatening the role collective agreements play in creating an inspiring profession for a new generation.

Finally, and I would like to leave you with this because it is a personal commitment of mine as president of ALPA, and because it is one of the most important issues that needs to be addressed in our industry.

We need to do more to create a diverse and inclusive aviation workforce while making certain that the United States continues to serve as the unquestioned leader in global aviation safety.

Our union is encouraging actions such as aligning federal funding support for the education required to become an airline pilot with that of other highly skilled professions.

We are also calling on the U.S. government to make aviation education more accessible to minorities and other underrepresented groups.

In addition, our industry has an opportunity to enhance the entry point for new aviators by improving the compensation, work life, and benefits offered to first-year pilots, especially for those in the fee-for-departure sector.

In these ways and many others, ALPA is pursuing innovative policy solutions and outreach strategies to cultivate a strong, safe, and diverse aviation workforce.

This year has been like no other for all Americans. U.S. workers have proven our power to counter an enormous crisis.

Pilots have partnered with our colleagues and companies to save and strengthen our industry and ensure our country can count on safe and efficient air transportation as a critical component of our nation's infrastructure.

Like all workers, airline pilots' workplace may have changed but our perspective from the flight deck has not.

Now, more than ever, we are aware of what a privilege it is to do what we love for a living: safely flying our passengers and cargo from departure to destination. We are also more aware than ever of the power of collective action and the power of labor...not just to raise wages, provide health care, and keep workers safe on the job...but to strengthen our economy and ensure our nation's prosperity.

Thank you.