

## Departures

### Opinions On Current Issues In Aviation

## Repeal The Most Effective Aviation Safety Law Ever Enacted? ALPA Pilots Won't Stand For It

CAPT. JOSEPH DEPETE

**Americans are cynical about Washington for many reasons, and what's happening in the airline industry today offers a prime example why.**

During the darkest days of the pandemic, when air travel dropped precipitously nearly overnight and airline revenue evaporated along with it, the federal government intervened and provided needed assistance to the American airline industry. Billions in taxpayer subsidies were provided to keep carriers afloat and ensure they were ready to fly once air travel demand resumed.

Rather than take the necessary steps to prepare for post-pandemic flying, many airlines took their eye off the ball and, in some cases, made the situation worse. Training backlogs, pilot displacements, early outs and a misreading of the potential strength of an economic recovery directly contributed to the mess we're in today, including the record flight delays, cancellations and customer service complaints.

Even after receiving billions in taxpayer subsidies, some airlines now want more relief—from laws and resulting regulations that made U.S. air transportation the safest in the world. They want to change the rules and move the goalposts that passengers count on to keep flying safe. In fact, some are calling for a repeal of the most effective aviation safety law ever enacted, which has resulted in a 99.8% reduction in airline fatalities since its passage.

Only in Washington, where special interests and their apologists promote an alternate reality, would there be calls to repeal a law that has been so impactful and saved so many lives. If they are successful, it will be the American flying public who will suffer—the same people who rescued the airlines during the pandemic.

Following a series of fatal airline accidents, Congress passed the Airline Safety and Federal Aviation Administration Extension Act of 2010. The federal regulations that resulted from the law

strengthened airline pilot qualification, training, and experience requirements. They also provide credit for academic training when determining how much experience is needed to become an airline first officer. For example, a pilot with military flight training and experience needs 750 flight hours. Aviators with accredited four- or two-year college or university flight training must have 1,000 or 1,250 hours, respectively. Those who don't have an aviation degree or military aviation background need 1,500 hours of flight experience to pilot an airliner.

Since these regulations went into effect, the U.S. has certified over 51,000 new airline pilots, skilled aviators who meet these safety-centered qualification, training, and experience requirements. During that same time, U.S. airlines hired over 29,000 pilots, meaning pilot production has outpaced hiring—all while airline fatalities have drastically decreased.

This is not a pilot-availability issue. Airlines offering competitive pay, benefits, and job quality are having no problem hiring pilots.

One airline recently boosted pilot pay and saw a 100% increase in applications. Those airlines attempting to shortchange pilots are facing challenges trying to attract and retain skilled aviators—it's just that simple.

Even more cynically, they're ending service to smaller communities where profitability has always been a challenge (despite

federal subsidies, in some cases) while claiming the reason is they can't find qualified pilots. In reality, airlines are making decisions based on which markets are most profitable, then trying to shift blame for leaving these communities without service.

ALPA is fully committed to ensuring the U.S. has a robust, diverse pilot pipeline, and we are prepared to work with anyone who, in good faith, is interested in achieving this goal. However, we will give no ground when it comes to protecting the hard-fought aviation safety gains achieved over the past decade.

**“Those airlines attempting to shortchange pilots are facing challenges trying to attract and retain skilled aviators—it's just that simple.”**

—Capt. Joseph DePete

Capt. Joseph DePete is President of the Air Line Pilots Association, International

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