



AIR LINE PILOTS ASSOCIATION, INTERNATIONAL

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THE WORLD'S LARGEST PILOTS UNION | WWW.ALPA.ORG

March 21, 2022

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave. SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

On behalf of the more than 62,000 pilots of the Air Line Pilots Association, Int'l (ALPA), I commend your leadership in insisting that SkyWest Airlines, which has received nearly \$2 billion in federal taxpayer support, deliver on its pledge to provide air service for America's small and rural communities.

SkyWest Airline's recent filing with the Department of Transportation (DOT), in which it indicated its intent to cut flights to 29 Essential Air Service (EAS) cities within 90 days, reflects an egregious miscarriage of the intent of Congress when it provided the airline with nearly \$2 billion in support. It also reveals an arrogance that only the most grasping corporate executives could possess.

During the pandemic, lawmakers passed three installments of the Payroll Support Program (PSP) to ensure that SkyWest Airlines and other U.S. airlines could maintain a strong workforce to drive the recovery. Congress has also granted multiple EAS program subsidies to SkyWest Airlines as part of ensuring that the nation's small and rural communities continue to have access to regular air service.

Despite this funding infusion bankrolled by U.S. taxpayers, SkyWest Airlines' filing states it will cut service to more than two dozen small cities from Pueblo, Colorado to Muskegon, Michigan. In attempting to justify its action, the company erroneously points to "an ongoing pilot staffing imbalance across the industry." At the same time, the airline's own annual reports show that, due in large part to PSP grants and loans, its pilot workforce is nearly 9 percent larger today than it was two years ago. More broadly, Bureau of Labor Statistics and Federal Aviation Administration data makes clear that the nation also has more than enough certificated pilots to meet current airline hiring demand.

Moreover, SkyWest Airlines applied to the DOT for additional EAS flying on February 17 and announced less than a month later that it would cut service to 29 other EAS cities. The airline's blatant attempt to cherry-pick certain EAS communities over others exposes not a pervasive staffing issue but an intentional decision to prioritize lucrative markets.

Thanks to the DOT, SkyWest Airlines has been blocked from discontinuing service to the 29 EAS cities as planned. The experience should serve to remind SkyWest Airlines that because of PSP support provided by Congress and U.S. taxpayers, including the critical provision in the American Rescue Plan, the company enjoys a stable economic position that has allowed it to retain and build its employee ranks.

Like all airline pilots, SkyWest aviators' professionalism and commitment to the "safe and reliable service" the airline cites in its marketing materials has enabled the company to survive the downturn and now prosper—something that would not have been possible without significant taxpayer subsidies.

We urge the DOT to remain vigilant in calling out and blocking efforts by companies such as SkyWest Airlines to accept federal relief funds and then cut routes. All Americans sacrificed during the pandemic and contributed to helping others get through the worst public health and economic crisis in a century. Those same Americans made sacrifices so that SkyWest could survive, and it is an outrageous affront to hardworking U.S. taxpayers that the company's management is now turning their backs on those who helped them.

ALPA pilots are eager to work with you and all aviation stakeholders to address the challenges our industry faces as the economic recovery increases demand for air travel. However, we will not allow the extraordinary sacrifices that pilots and all Americans made during this public health crisis to be cavalierly disregarded by CEOs who seek to exploit this moment to line their pockets and those of their shareholders. We will remain watchful to ensure that such hypocrisy is stamped out and the spirit in which the U.S. government granted the PSP and EAS federal support is respected.

Together, government, industry, and labor can ensure that U.S. airlines continue to deliver for customers in communities of all sizes and U.S. air transportation continues to be the safest in the world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joseph G. DePete".

Capt. Joseph G. DePete
President