

## **Capt. Jason Ambrosi's IAC Luncheon Remarks**

June 25, 2024

The Army Navy Club (901 17th St NW, Washington, DC 20006)

Thank you all for being here today and for the opportunity to talk about the view from the flight deck. And thank you to IAC president Amna Arshad for inviting me to speak at your luncheon. I certainly hope I don't disappoint!

Collaboration between industry, regulators, and labor has built the safest period in airline history, saved lives, and strengthened our industry. Together, we keep passengers, crew, cargo, and the communities under our wings safe.

It's great to see so many familiar faces in this room—each reminding me of the significant level of collaboration we've had on several issues:

Earlier this year, ALPA joined with A4A as well as other labor unions in asking the U.S. government to ensure workers and businesses are guaranteed equality of access in the marketplace, free from the existing harmful anti-competitive policies of the Chinese government.

Also last year, we joined forces when the Dutch government announced it would implement flight caps due to "noise reduction" into Amsterdam Schiphol Airport, conveniently cherry-picking JetBlue, a relatively new entrant, to be on their list of cuts. Together we ensured that JetBlue maintained their slots and we held the Dutch government accountable to uphold the US-EU Open Skies agreement.

Last week, we earned another win for safety as the FAA announced that it will propose a rule to close the public charter loophole. That loophole allows some airlines to operate at a lesser standard while sharing the same airspace, with the same passengers, with essentially scheduled flights, from largely the same airports, which is unacceptable.

And most significantly, we are just a few weeks past the signing of the FAA reauthorization bill, and we certainly all worked hard to get that done. I'm grateful to have collaborated with many of you to get this bill passed with the improvements that our industry needs, and we did it without compromising on safety.

Throughout the history of aviation, industry, regulators, and labor have worked together to raise the bar on safety. Today, we are 15 years into the safest period in U.S. airline history because we learned hard lessons from tragic losses and collaborated to build commercial air travel into the safest mode of transportation in the world.

That is *our* collective success—and it should remain *our* collective goal.

The success we've built stems from recognizing the importance of having highly-trained and experienced aviation professionals working at every level of the system—none more critical than on the flight deck. However, U.S. aviation is facing an international challenge on the flight deck, and it is a challenge that I hope we will face together, in partnership and collaboration.

Just since I took office at the beginning of 2023, there have been several high-profile events that highlight the necessity of a crew of at least two pilots working together to ensure the successful outcome of what otherwise could have been a tragedy.

Last February, in Austin, a FedEx Boeing 767 that was cleared to land in low visibility, almost collided with a Southwest Boeing 737 loaded with 123 passengers, which was cleared to takeoff from the same runway. It was the first officer—the pilot monitoring—who saw the 737 through the fog still on the runway, just in time to call for a go-around, which the captain—the pilot flying—immediately executed. Without two pilots on the flight deck that morning, the results would have been tragic for the 131 souls on those flights.

During the National Transportation Safety Board meeting on the incident earlier this month, Board Chair Jennifer Homendy credited the professionalism, focus, and heroic actions of the FedEx crew in averting tragedy.

While it is still under investigation, the outcome for Alaska flight 1282, in which a door blew out in-flight resulting in an explosive decompression, would also have been very different if there was a single pilot in the flight deck at the time of the incident. Working together, a team of two pilots turned a dangerous situation into a safe landing without casualties.

Automation didn't avert these disasters.

Technology didn't avert these disasters.

It was a team of TWO pilots working together that averted these disasters.

While these events and the danger posed to the passengers and crew was the result of a combination of factors, the critical safety feature that prevented it—a team of two highly trained, well-rested, and fully qualified pilots—worked. Exactly. As. Designed.

Incredibly, despite stories like this—and other in-flight issues that happen more often than you ever hear about—some manufacturers and foreign airlines are actually working to design flight decks that replace the very safety feature that averted these disasters. They plan to replace pilots with automation. Of course, that's insane.

Today the Air Line Pilots Association is releasing a white paper on the dangers of these schemes to operate with fewer than two pilots on the flight deck during all phases of flight.

As we were reminded in these incidents and ones like them, pilots provide the vital—and irreplaceable—ability to identify and react during a wide range of critical moments in flight. Our white paper reinforces the well-established fact that pilots cannot be replaced through advances in technology and outlines the benefits of having at least two pilots on the flight deck. Reduced-crew operations not only suffer the safety risks of higher workloads for the remaining pilot, or the incapacitation of the single pilot, but it also puts aviation safety on the edge of what technology is capable of.

As an airline pilot, I can tell you, technology fails, even on the flight deck. Putting increased trust in autonomous systems creates an overreliance on systems that could fail—or be hacked—and requires more complex interactions between systems and pilots. All of these threats combined creates a more failure-prone environment on the flight deck—and places our entire system at risk.

Pilots embrace technology as a tool to *enhance* safety. As a captain on the Boeing 767, I utilize and welcome technology to decrease workload and enhance awareness while creating a safer and more comfortable flight for passengers. That is exactly how technology should be used in aviation, but that isn't what reduced-crew operations will accomplish.

In practice, reduced-crew and single-pilot operation schemes, like Airbus's so-called extended Minimum Crew Operations (eMCO), are a gamble with safety—and a gamble with people's lives.

At its core, eMCO leaves one pilot alone on the flight deck during the cruise phase of the flight while the other pilot is in another part of the aircraft. When this one pilot attends to physiological needs or becomes incapacitated it leaves no one at the controls, the only person who can step in to fly that aircraft will be asleep in a bunk rather than on the flight deck where they belong. Single pilot operations are effectively zero pilot operations in airline transportation, which could be catastrophic in an emergency.

I have thousands of hours over the North Atlantic, and can tell you with no uncertainty that in the middle of the night in cruise, having only one pilot is a significant degradation in safety. Imagine an emergency like an engine fire, security event or incapacitation of the remaining pilot. The safety of the traveling and shipping public demands we refuse to entertain this unsafe idea.

Regardless of what some executives designing the systems say, removing pilots reduces safety. Trying to engineer a way to remove pilots from the flight deck is not about fighting fatigue and certainly not about improving safety, it is all about the economics of reducing pilot costs. Imagine less than two pilots during the Alaska incident, or an explosive decompression at 35,000 feet over the North Atlantic.

None other than the CEO of Commercial Aircraft for Airbus, Christian Scherer recently acknowledged this risk in an interview saying, "It all needs to cater for the eventuality that this

one guy just ate a bad oyster and is incapacitated and the aeroplane has to take over. So, one pilot or zero pilot is effectively the same thing.”

Airbus itself acknowledges that their plan to operate aircraft with one pilot is inherently flawed.

It should be noted that this threat to replace pilots with automation won't happen in American skies first.

Rather, the European Union Aviation Safety Agency is exploring a rulemaking that would allow Airbus to remove pilots from the flight deck before completing a study on the safety implications of such a move.

To prevent this risk to safety from reaching our country, we must work together with aviation regulators and stakeholders to discourage it across the globe. We cannot allow foreign regulators to grease the skids for their manufacturers, trying to force our hand to undermine safety in our country.

And we cannot create unsafe conditions for American passengers traveling into and out of the United States on foreign carriers.

Removing pilots from the flight deck isn't something that only U.S. pilots are opposed to. We've formed a global coalition with pilots around the world in collaboration with those in industry as well as regulators who feel the same.

And in a recent poll ALPA conducted of the flying public, 79 percent said they would feel less safe flying on remotely operated planes, and similarly they said they would *never* feel comfortable flying without two pilots on the flight deck.

This fundamental mission of safety is why ALPA—the world's largest pilots' union, representing more than 78,000 professional airline pilots in the U.S. and Canada—was founded 93 years ago. In 1960, President John F. Kennedy said, “The American Labor Movement has consistently demonstrated its devotion to the public interest. It is, and has been, good for all America.” 64 years later, this statement still rings loud and rings true.

We appreciate the Biden Administration's strong support for the rights of workers and believe that labor standards have a place in the U.S. government's determination of what is in the public interest for aviation. Whether before the International Labor Organization, ICAO, or somewhere else, the highest standard for labor should always be a central consideration for the United States.

And I'm pleased to report that labor rights were central to a decision reached last week by the Tenth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals when they rejected an attempt by Breeze Airways to undermine the rights of some of our newest ALPA members. This victory is significant as it reaffirms decades of established precedent that protects the rights of employees to organize.

Together with my colleagues in labor who are here today, and others across the industry, we have helped shape the airline industry into not just an economic driver for our country, but the safest mode of transportation in the world.

Everyone in this room should be proud of the safety record that we have built. We did this together, through decades of hard work and hard lessons learned in the wake of terrible tragedies.

In closing, I urge all of you here today to reflect on those lessons learned as we contemplate a future—one that is being developed at this moment—where we roll the dice with a single pilot at the controls on long-haul flights, with the goal of relying solely on computers to operate commercial airliners. No humans in the loop. No flight crews to troubleshoot real-world, in-flight emergencies.

That's not a bet I'm willing to take, and it's not a bet I believe the American aviation industry is willing to take either.

Earlier this year Delta CEO Ed Bastian said on CNN, "I will never get on a plane unless there's two Delta pilots, at least two Delta pilots." And the U.S. DOT has said that FAA Administrator Mike Whitaker's commitment to aviation safety includes protecting pilot training, preserving qualification regulations, and keeping at least two well-trained pilots on the flight deck. I trust removing pilots from the flight deck is not a bet you're willing to take either. We should never gamble with safety in the aviation industry.

Together as an industry, we have built the safest way for Americans to travel. It is because of our willingness to collaborate for safety that more and more Americans are entrusting their lives to us. The benefits of the trust travelers place in us has never been more clear than this summer travel season that has already broken records day after day.

Because of our success in making air travel safer, our customers trust that when they board one of our flights they will get to their destination safely. We have earned their trust, but we are always one accident away from losing it. We have an incredible responsibility to our passengers, cargo shippers, and the communities under our wings to continue working together to improve our safety record. However, the threat of reduced crew operations undermines our responsibility to ensure safety.

If EASA and Airbus have their way and begin implementing reduced crew operations abroad—which we must always remember is essentially zero pilot operations—we will pass the point of no return as an industry. Make no mistake, if we permit these operations in other parts globe, it will put unnecessary competitive pressure on U.S. airlines, who oppose this degradation in safety. Together we must work to protect our unparalleled safety record because the stakes are too high to gamble with safety in aviation.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak, and I look forward to your questions.