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Oral Testimony**

**U.S. House Aviation Subcommittee Hearing
"COVID-19's Effects on U.S. Aviation and the Flight Path to Recovery"
Tuesday, March 2, 2021**

As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Chairman Larsen, Ranking Member Graves, and members of the subcommittee. I am Capt. Joe DePete, President of the Air Line Pilots Association, Int'l, which represents more than 59,000 pilots and is the world's largest airline pilot union and nongovernmental aviation safety organization.

Since the pandemic began, airline pilots have been on the front lines in the fight against COVID-19. We've kept supply chains flowing and the global economy connected. We've transported medical personnel, PPE, and life-saving vaccines. And we've worked to ensure that aviation can fulfill its critical role in the nation's economic recovery once the public health crisis is behind us.

ALPA pilots have not allowed the pandemic to distract us from what is always our highest priority: safety. For years, ALPA pilots have advocated a data-driven, risk-based approach to safety. During COVID-19, pilots have instituted a proactive safety culture on every flight. We gather data to identify the effects of the pandemic and inform decision makers how to protect the traveling public.

Backed by the data, ALPA was among the first to call for uniform, mandatory guidelines for cleaning and disinfecting aircraft, employee exposure notification, and the use of face masks. We appreciate this subcommittee's support of these measures. We are pleased that the Biden administration has mandated masks for public transportation—something that should have been done a long time ago.

In addition, ALPA has called for airline pilots to receive priority access to vaccines to ensure they can continue to support the public health response and economic recovery. Flight crews are already deemed essential workers by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency—and they should be deemed essential workers regarding vaccine prioritization.

Internationally, some countries have established COVID-19 policies that have disturbing consequences for U.S. pilots. ALPA urges our government to ensure that U.S. citizens can be safely evacuated from any location, if necessary, and that we preserve the dignity of work by ensuring U.S. pilots are not subjected to unacceptable conditions related to the pandemic.

Research shows that layered public health precautions have created a very low risk of virus transmission on airplanes. Despite this evidence, the number of U.S. passenger flights is currently down 50 percent from pre-pandemic levels. DCA, for example, has experienced a 67 percent decline in scheduled passenger flights from two years ago.

Similar drop-offs across the country have resulted in shuttered airlines and aviation worker layoffs. Three ALPA carriers—Trans States Airlines, Compass Airlines, and ExpressJet—have ceased operations, and their pilots are now jobless.

Because airlines may seek reorganization, Congress must reform the broken Chapter 11 process to protect collective bargaining agreements.

In the meantime, ALPA pilots have stepped up to weather this storm by negotiating more than 100 agreements with our airlines to help stabilize our companies and fuel recovery.

The COVID-19 crisis is unprecedented in its speed, magnitude, and duration. By passing the CARES Act Payroll Support Program (PSP), Congress kept tens of thousands of aviation workers on the payroll and connected to health care. ALPA pilots are indebted to Chairman DeFazio, Chairman Larsen, and others for developing and extending the PSP.

While the PSP has been a historic success, our industry remains in a precarious position. Many ALPA members and other aviation workers have received notices of furlough as soon as March 31.

Putting furloughed pilots back on the flight deck isn't as simple as flipping a switch. Airline pilots are subject to training requirements and medical certifications that take time to requalify. Keeping a strong U.S. pilot workforce is critical to the recovery.

Recently, the importance of a strong pilot workforce and our nation having two qualified, trained, and experienced pilots on board its airliners became clear once again, when a United flightcrew made a safe emergency landing following an engine failure on a flight from Denver to Honolulu.

With the hopeful trends in virus containment and vaccine rollout and our collective work to position the pilot workforce and airline industry for a successful rebound, we are cautiously optimistic about recovery. With continued leadership from Congress, we can make certain that the United States—and its passengers and cargo shippers—can count on a strong pilot workforce now and in the future.

Thank you.