

Huerta, Dorgan, Smisek to Appear as Key Witnesses

Buffalo, New York - May 18th, 2015 - Continuing their efforts to stand up to airline industry pressure to water down key regional airline safety reforms, the 'Families of Continental Flight 3407' announced that group members will be in attendance at Tuesday's Senate Commerce Committee hearing focused on air traffic control and the upcoming FAA Reauthorization Bill. The group highlighted FAA Administrator Michael Huerta, former Senator Byron Dorgan, and United Airlines CEO Jeffrey Smisek, who are all part of the panel of witnesses for the hearing.

"While this hearing is focused on air traffic control and not on regional airline safety, it is absolutely critical that Senator Thune continues to see us in the gallery for this hearing, and even more importantly, when he holds the mark-up for this bill," stated Susan Bourque of East Aurora, New York, who lost her sister Beverly Eckert, a prominent 9/11 widow and activist. "There is also certainly symbolism with Senator Dorgan being in attendance; his leadership as the chairman of the Aviation Subcommittee at the time of the crash and the hard-hitting hearings that he held were a driving force in getting to the bottom of what needed to be fixed in the industry and the subsequent regional airline safety bill."

The group also zeroed in on the appearance of United Airlines Chief Executive Officer Jeffrey Smisek, who was the CEO of Continental Airlines at the time of the crash - Flight 3407 was operated by Colgan Air under a code share agreement with Continental. Smisek drew the ire of the family group at a House Aviation Subcommittee meeting back in 2010 when he attempted to place the blame for the training deficiencies of the Flight 3407 crew on the FAA.

"We said it then and we will say it again; a code share agreement is not an excuse for a parent carrier to turn a blind eye to what is happening with its regional partners, and even worse, to point the finger at the FAA when something goes wrong," stated John Kausner of Clarence Center, New York, who lost his twenty-four year old daughter Ellyce in the crash of Flight 3407 in February 2009. "Maybe Mr. Smisek thinks that his job isn't safety, but as Captain Sullenberger said at the recent House safety roundtable, "The major airlines have been able to avoid liability for the actions of their regional affiliates, but they cannot evade responsibility for them." The roots of all that went wrong with Flight 3407 can be traced back decades to the evolution of a horrible industry model: parent carriers outsourcing to regional airlines, and then looking the other way as the regionals hired low-experience pilots for next to nothing and then trained them on the cheap. Our aviation system is only as strong as its weakest link, and we

continue to call on Mr. Smisek and his fellow industry leaders to be zeroed in on the Great Lakes Airlines of the world; this is where the next needless tragedy is likely to occur if we do not remain vigilant."

Finally, the group used the appearance of Huerta to focus on the still-in-progress Pilot Records Database, as well as to call attention to the glut of petitions for exemption that have been filed in response to recently-imposed pilot qualifications rule.

"As the person who arguably has the most sway in our nation when it comes to aviation safety, we continue to look to Administrator Huerta to provide key leadership in making sure that the mistakes that led to Flight 3407 are never allowed to repeat themselves," declared Scott Maurer of Brandon, Florida, who lost his thirty year-old daughter Lorin in the crash. "Certainly there has been a lot of discussion recently in terms of the pilot records database, and ensuring that the transparency that it will bring to the pilot screening and hiring process is achieved sooner rather than later. However, we would be remiss if we did not call attention to the one thousand-plus petitions that have been filed with FAA seeking exemption from the pilot qualifications rule. We implore Administrator Huerta to stand his ground for safety and not bend to industry pressure. We have learned the hard way that when it comes to seeking loopholes, the Colgan's of the world will always be at the front of the line, and it is time for us to challenge regional airlines to race to the top and not to the bottom."