

Western NY Delegation Sends Strong Warning to Regional Airlines About Challenging Safety Initiatives

Buffalo, New York - February 3rd, 2016 - With 'Miracle on the Hudson' co-pilot Jeff Skiles and the entire Western New York congressional delegation locked arm-in-arm alongside them, the 'Families of Continental Flight 3407 made a strong stand for regional airline safety as they descended upon Washington in conjunction with the 7th anniversary of the needless tragedy. The group was also buoyed by the support it received as its members conducted nearly 50 meetings on Capitol Hill calling on Congress to resist efforts by the Regional Airline Association and its lobbyist to water down stronger regional airline safety measures brought about by the passage of Public Law 111-216, 'The Airline Safety and Federal Aviation Administration Extension Act of 2010.'

"To hear one of the most veteran members of Congress in Congresswoman Slaughter, side-by-side with such a steadfast supporter in Congressman Higgins, call our advocacy effort one of the most remarkable she has seen in all of her years of experience means so much to us," stated Karen Eckert of Williamsville, New York, who lost her sister Beverly Eckert, a prominent 9/11 widow and activist. "And then to have Congressmen Reed and Collins, who have been there for us every step of way, taking a stand for us as well truly speaks to the bipartisanship of our cause and our effort." As the group made the rounds on Capitol Hill after the press conference, in preparation for the release of language for the FAA Reauthorization Bill by the House's Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, it was heartened by interaction between Congressman Collins and House Transportation Chairman Bill Shuster, which seemed to point towards Shuster's support of a strong approach to regional airline safety standards advocated by the group in the Bill.

"From day one, our position on the FAA Reauthorization Bill is that it should at minimum preserve, if not even strengthen, the stronger regional airline safety measures brought about by our tragedy and the unanimous passage of Public Law 111-216," stated John Kausner of Clarence Center, New York, who lost his twenty four year old daughter Ellyce. "In particular, we are adamant that Congress does not touch the more stringent qualification standards for regional airline first officers. Obviously you can never know for sure until the language is officially released, but we are encouraged that Chairmen Shuster and LoBiondo are going to be on our side on this one. And we are extremely indebted to Congressman Collins for being so adamant for us on this issue with the Chairman."

The group also highlighted the promise made by New York's Senators Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand to block any legislation in the Senate that would water down or roll back any

of the new safety regulations brought about by P.L. 111-216.

“Obviously we can never forget back in 2010 the devastation we felt when a senator threatened to block the safety legislation we were fighting so passionately for on account of his pet corporation and its lobbyist,” stated Susan Bourque of East Aurora, New York, another sister of Beverly Eckert. “Now it is comforting to know that this powerful weapon is ready and willing to be used on behalf of a citizen advocacy group like ours. Once again, we are so fortunate to have two diligent and determined members in Senators Schumer and Gillibrand fighting for us in the Senate.”

Finally the group hearkened back to the presence of First Officer Skiles in Washington, and the continued support of him and Captain Sully Sullenberger on behalf of their cause. They also cited the dramatic improvement in regional airline safety in the wake of Flight 3407. In the eight years from 2001 to the crash in 2009, there were six fatal commercial airline crashes, all on regional carriers; in the nearly seven years since the crash, there have not been any.

"It continues to be convenient for our opposition to mischaracterize our position as being obsessed with having young pilots fly around in circles towing banners," stated Scott Maurer of Palmetto, Florida, who lost his thirty year old daughter Lorin. "We have always said that we do not consider ourselves as the experts, and certainly were not the ones who came up with the concept for the legislation calling for these new qualification requirements that was unanimously approved by Congress, nor the final regulation that was developed by the FAA. But absolutely no one can question the credentials of Captain Sullenberger and First Officer Skiles in this regard, who personify the idea that 'Experience Matters,' and have consistently defended the value of these higher experience requirements. Most importantly, no one can argue with the results: since this very senseless crash, the comprehensive actions taken by Congress and the FAA, along with the increased scrutiny of regional airlines through the efforts of our group and numerous others, have resulted in an unprecedented era of regional airline safety. It would be completely irresponsible to send the regionals any signal that a return to their previous short-cutting ways is acceptable."