

Call on Majority Leader McConnell to Not Allow a Vote

Buffalo, New York - April 14th, 2016 - As the Senate worked through the FAA Reauthorization Bill on the floor, the 'Families of Continental Flight 3407' announced their strong opposition to a proposed amendment by Senator Mike Rounds (R-SD). The amendment which would allow entry-level regional airline first officers to receive flight hour credit for their initial training at their hiring airline, would effectively provide a shortcut around the stronger pilot qualification requirements enacted by the FAA in 2013 as a result of the regional airline safety bill unanimously passed by Congress in 2010 in the wake of Continental Flight 3407.

"When it comes to something as technical as pilot training, you would expect this amendment to come from someone on the committee of jurisdiction, so this makes you wonder who Senator Rounds is talking to when he is the one that puts this forward," stated Scott Maurer of Palmetto, Florida, who lost his thirty year old daughter Lorin. "Clearly this is being pushed by or on behalf of the Regional Airline Association, and there obviously is a South Dakota angle here. You have RAA member Great Lakes Airlines, who just happens to service South Dakota, and who every time we come to Washington is making noise for this exemption and for that loophole. Not to mention the huge government subsidy they accept every year, and their less-than-stellar record when it comes to maintenance, reliable operation, and paying their pilots food stamp-level wages. So if you're the father of Lorin Maurer, and you wake up every day with a massive hole in your heart from a totally needless tragedy, what do you say to Senator Rounds and to our Congress in general when it sure as heck looks like the tail is wagging the dog? Instead of doing the right thing and challenging our regional airlines to step up to the plate and raise their game to the level of the mainline carriers, we are looking for every possible way to accommodate them with loopholes. We call on Majority Leader McConnell to allow this proposal to go no further."

"Obviously I am not happy with Senator Rounds for bringing this forward, but I want to express my profound disappointment in Senator Thune as well," stated John Kausner of Clarence Center, New York who lost his twenty-four year old daughter Ellyce. "He is Senator Rounds' senior partner in the South Dakota delegation, and more importantly, as the Commerce Committee Chairman, he is the point man on this whole FAA Bill. I have a hard time believing that Senator Rounds went this one alone without Senator Thune's blessing and/or encouragement. So many including myself, Scott Maurer, Mike Loftus, Jim Neill, Gayle Saltzgeber and others, lost beautiful, talented, incredible children who had so much more life left to live and so much more to give this world. From one father to another, I call on Senator Thune to challenge all these regional airlines to enhance their entry-level training programs, not so that they can get an allowance from the FAA, but rather because it's the right thing to do for every member of the traveling public. If someone did this to Colgan Air over a decade ago and held them accountable for better stall recognition and recovery training for their pilots on the Q-400, we would not be having this discussion in the first place."

The family group also highlighted the fact that the anniversary of the crash on February 12th marked seven years with no fatal commercial airline crashes on U.S. carriers, the longest such period in U.S. aviation history. This came on the heels of the previous six fatal commercial crashes all occurring on regional carriers between 2001 and 2009. The group pointed to the landmark aviation safety legislation that was unanimously passed by Congress in 2010, and the accompanying increased scrutiny of the nation's regional airlines, as being critical drivers in addressing the glaring safety gap that had developed between the nation's mainline and regional carriers.

"We cannot emphasize enough the huge strides that have been made safety-wise since this very preventable tragedy as a result of the concerted efforts of every one involved with our commercial aviation system, from Congress to FAA to NTSB to the airlines and pilots themselves," stated Karen Eckert of Williamsville, New York who lost her sister and noted 9/11 widow and activist, Beverly Eckert. "That came after over a decade of shortcuts and missteps that resulted in a very glaring safety gap developing between our nation's mainline and regional carriers. These stronger pilot qualification standards have become a scapegoat for the painful after-effects of a very shaky regional airline business model that has put intense pressure on regional carriers to take every shortcut possible to stay viable economically. So here we have desperate regional airlines petitioning Congress for legislative bailouts that will allow them to maintain what has become a very tenuous status quo, while at the same time the mainline carriers are reaping record profits from lower fuel costs and from charging every fee under the sun. Seemingly what is needed here isn't another government bailout; it's the mainline and regional carriers doing a much better job of working together for the good of all involved, particularly for the safety of the traveling public. Hopefully the airlines and the free market can figure that out, but in the meantime, we fervently hope that Senator Thune and everyone else involved in this FAA Bill do not send regional airlines the wrong message that it is acceptable to go back to their old, short-cutting ways that resulted in such a devastating tragedy for our family and so many others."