

Transportation Secretary to Testify on FAA Reauthorization This Week Before Senate, House Committees

Buffalo, New York - June 6, 2017 - With new Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao scheduled to testify on FAA Reauthorization before Senate and House committees this week, members of the 'Families of Continental Flight 3407' called on the Secretary to stand up for critical regional airline safety initiatives in the midst of an industry push to water down or eliminate them entirely.

"It's open season on regulations these days, and clearly the airlines see an opportunity to tack onto their record profits by making a play to water down safety initiatives which were unanimously enacted by Congress in the wake of multiple fatal regional airline crashes, culminating in the highly preventable tragedy of Flight 3407," declared Scott Maurer of Palmetto, Florida, who lost his thirty-year-old daughter Lorin in the crash. "These new safety measures addressing pilot qualifications, training, fatigue, and safety management systems at the regional airline level have resulted in eight years of ZERO fatal commercial crashes on U.S. carriers, by far and away the safest period of air travel in our history. It is our fervent hope that under Secretary Chao's leadership, DOT and FAA will not send the airlines the wrong message that it is acceptable to return to their previous short-cutting ways that robbed so many of us of our loved ones in what was such a highly avoidable crash. Just as importantly, we are counting on her to see through the completion of the electronic pilot record database, another common-sense safety undertaking that has bipartisan support. And as we always emphasize, don't take our word for it; take the word of Captain Chesley 'Sully' Sullenberger, and First Officer Jeff Skiles, the crew of the Miracle on the Hudson, whose years of experience and heroic performance uniquely qualify them to speak on the state of our commercial airline industry."

The family group also lashed out at fear-mongering by those in the industry about an alleged pilot shortage, all under the guise of getting Congress to roll back stronger pilot qualification standards instituted in the wake of the crash. It cited numbers provided by the FAA indicating that since the new rules went into effect, the annual number of newly-certificated commercial airline pilots has been nearly double the projected number of industry openings. Since 2014, the pool of newly-issued Airline Transport Pilot (ATP) and Restricted-ATP pilots, as well as pilots exiting the military has consistently exceeded 11,000 per year, with the corresponding yearly demand for new pilots in the Part 121 environment lying in the range of 3,000-5,000. The family group also pointed to a recent Inspector General report on pilot pay, which highlighted a few lower-level regional airlines with average first officer salaries in the \$20,000-\$29,000 range, as evidence of the regional carriers who are having difficulty attracting pilots and providing reliable air service. Not surprisingly, the IG report indicates that first officers at these airlines only spent an average of 1.6-1.8 years working for these carriers.

"We look forward to continuing to counter this false narrative created by the regional airlines and their cronies in the 'pilot shortage cartel' that the sky is falling because of these new safety regulations," stated Susan Bourque, of East Aurora, New York, who lost her sister and noted 9/11 widow and activist Beverly Eckert. "This conveniently overlooks nearly two decades of poor pay and working conditions at the regional airline level prior to the introduction of these new pilot qualification requirements that have had much more of an impact on discouraging interest in commercial aviation as a viable career path. In order to generate a more robust pilot supply moving into the future, we need all stakeholders to be less concerned about rolling back these safety initiatives and instead, more focused on the importance of getting young people excited about flying, of finding ways to make flight training more affordable, and more creative, outside-the-box approaches to creating flow-through agreements and stable career pathways for aspiring young pilots. And most importantly, we need ALL regional airlines to offer pay scales and working conditions for entry-level first officers that properly reflect the critical safety nature of their jobs."

Secretary Chao will appear before the Senate Commerce Committee on Wednesday at 10 am in Room 253 of the Russell Senate Office Building, and before the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure on Thursday at 9:30 am in Room 2167 of the Rayburn House Office Building.