

Regional Airlines Pushing Commerce Committee to Roll Back Critical Safety Initiatives in FAA Bill

Buffalo, New York - June 20, 2017 - With the 'Families of Continental Flight 3407' scheduled to head to Washington this week as rumors swirl of attempts by regional airline lobbyists to pressure Senate and House lawmakers to water down critical safety initiatives enacted in the wake of the fatal regional airline crash, the group reacted strongly when the office of Senator Roy Blunt of Missouri, the chairman of the Senate Aviation Subcommittee, did not accommodate a meeting request for the Senator from a Missouri couple who lost their daughter in the crash.

"When we heard last week that some of Senator Blunt's colleagues on the Commerce Committee were pushing to water down the critical regional airline safety rules that we fought so hard for and that our daughter needlessly lost her life for, we immediately offered to join the family group in Washington this week," stated Gale Saltzgiver of Branson, Missouri, who along with his wife Cindi lost their daughter, Kristin Safran, in the crash. "As Missouri residents, Cindi and I along with other members of our group have previously met with his staff, but with Senator Blunt now being the Chairman of the Aviation Subcommittee this Congress, and with how passionately our group has fought on this issue of regional airline safety, Cindi and I felt it was critical that Senator Blunt hear directly from us. This tragedy has had an absolutely devastating impact on our family, and we feel that this is a life-and-death issue, not just for us, but for the entire American flying public. To get referred to another staffer yet again, when we made our meeting request specifically for the Senator, was extremely disappointing, and frankly, insulting. We had Senator Blunt's back last fall when he had a tough reelection, but we voted for him, not for his legislative assistant or scheduler or chief of staff. Hopefully he will reconsider our request and give us a chance to share our story and make our case."

Kristin Safran was a bottled water industry executive from Bradford, Pennsylvania, who left behind a husband and two young daughters when Continental Flight 3407 crashed on approach to the Buffalo Airport in February 2009. Since then, in honor of her and all the others who were lost that evening, the family group has relentlessly advocated in Washington for stronger regional airline measures. Its efforts were rewarded in August 2010 with the unanimous passage by Congress of landmark aviation safety legislation, and in the years subsequent to that, the Federal Aviation Administration has implemented numerous safety initiatives directed by that bill, focused on pilot qualifications, training, fatigue and other critical areas. As a result of these efforts, over eight years have passed without a fatal domestic commercial airline crash, the longest such period in U.S. history by over three times.

"Along with our granddaughter, that was three plane tickets and a hotel room for two nights on barely a week's notice, on our own dime and certainly not cheap," added Cindi Saltzgeber, who will be accompanied by Kristin's fourteen-year-old daughter Alex. "Some members of our group have done this over seventy-five times. We're not lobbyists with posh offices in Washington, looking to wine and dine members and their staffers at Washington's finest restaurants. We're just trying to fight for the memory of our daughter who was lost way too soon in a tragedy that was easily preventable. As chairman of the Aviation Subcommittee, I am sure that Senator Blunt has taken many meetings and phone calls from a variety of entities and their lobbyists leading up to the drafting of this FAA Bill; airlines, manufacturers, airports, and many other aviation industry stakeholders. All of these Commerce Committee hearings and press releases always say that safety comes first, but now and always, actions speak louder than words, and when we can't even get a meeting with Senator Blunt, those words certainly ring hollow. The safety bill that we helped get passed has resulted in a remarkable safety improvement in our nation's regional airlines over the past eight years, and it would be absolutely irresponsible for Congress to do anything to even remotely threaten what Kristin and so many other wonderful people tragically gave their lives for."