

Group Urges Full Senate to Block Consideration of FAA Bill with Dangerous Anti-Safety Language

Buffalo, New York - July 13, 2017 - With the FAA authorization set to expire at the end of September and regional airlines desperately attempting to water down critical safety initiatives which have resulted in eight years of no fatal commercial aviation crashes on US domestic carriers, the Families of Continental Flight 3407 vowed to continue their push to ensure that Congress does not cave in to pressure from regional airlines and their lobbyists.

"Ever since the 2015 Senate hearing when Captain Sullenberger made the most clear and convincing case possible that these safety initiatives are absolutely essential to ensuring that our nation's commercial aviation service remains the envy of the world when it comes to safety, the regional lobbying machine has done everything in its power to cloud and obscure what was so obvious to Congress back in 2009 and 2010 in the wake of the NTSB investigation into Flight 3407," stated Scott Maurer of Palmetto, Florida who lost his thirty-year-old daughter Lorin. "In the aftermath of the unanimous passage of this safety legislation, and an unmatched safety record ever since, the regionals and their allies have been lurking in the shadows here in DC, plotting task forces and hearing panels to provide the needed smoke and mirrors to support a way forward to water down these critical safety initiatives. As both the Senate and House move to bring their FAA bills to the floor for the full consideration of their respective bodies, we pledge to continue our quest on behalf of Lorin and all our loved ones who were so tragically and needlessly lost to ensure that the safety of the millions of Americans who board regional airlines every day is not compromised for the sake of big-dollar campaign contributions or shortcut-driven regional airline balance sheets."

Public Law 111-216, the Federal Aviation Administration Extension and Airline Safety Act was enacted in 2010 by voice vote in the House and unanimous consent in the Senate. It was the result of extensive bipartisan committee work on both sides of the Hill in the wake of the National Transportation Safety Board's investigation into the crash of Flight 3407, which cast a harsh light on the safety practices of some of the nation's regional airlines. It was a comprehensive approach to safety, targeting the areas of pilot qualifications, training, fatigue, and airline safety management systems. From 1990 through 2009, there were over 1,100 fatalities in U.S. commercial aviation crashes on domestic carriers. In the eight years subsequent to the crash of Flight 3407 and the implementation of the Safety Act, there have been zero fatal crashes, the longest such period in U.S. aviation history by over three times.

"From a safety standpoint, it should be a no-brainer for every member of Congress in terms of whether to listen to the mayor of Pierre, South Dakota, and the 14,000 people she represents, versus Sully Sullenberger and Jeff Skiles, the crew of the Miracle on the Hudson, in terms of whose insights to rely on when it comes to the millions of Americans who depend on our nation's regional airlines to safely deliver them to their destination every day," stated Karen Eckert, of Williamsville, New York, who lost her sister and noted 9/11 widow and activist Beverly Eckert. "We wholeheartedly support the importance of preserving access to commercial air service for small communities; however to do so at the expense of safety is absolutely unconscionable. We have been to Hibbing, Minnesota, and the families there who tragically lost loved ones in a regional airline crash should stand as a strong example to any other essential air service (EAS) community as to how crucial it is to hold their regional air service providers to the highest safety standard possible. With all the brainpower that our nation has at its disposal in Washington, the American flying public should be able to expect solutions that come nowhere close to compromising safety."

The family group is now on record in opposition to the Senate's FAA reauthorization bill, which passed out of the Commerce Committee including an amendment seeking to create loopholes in the stronger entry-level experience requirements for regional airline first officers. The amendment barely passed on a 14-13 vote.

"On one side of the argument, you have these lobbyists using buzzwords like 'disciplined' and 'structured' as camouflage to promote flight hour credit for the same type of airline training programs that Colgan Air provided and my daughter paid the ultimate price for," declared John Kausner, of Clarence Center, New York, who lost his twenty-four-year-old daughter Elly when the plane crashed less than a mile from their family home. "Talk about not learning from a mistake. But even though the major airlines are charging exorbitant fees and making record profits, instead of challenging them to adjust their business model to give their regional partners some wiggle room to beef up their safety programs, we are scratching and clawing for loopholes to enable the airline industry as a whole to further this vicious cycle. Any member of Congress or their staffers who wake up each morning and convince themselves that this is the right way to go for our nation should be absolutely ashamed of themselves. And if you have a daughter or a son yourself, feel free to go online and google a picture of Ellyce Kausner, and get back to me on why these long-overdue safety enhancements are such a burden to some of these regional airlines who you are so misguidedly fighting for."