

Huerta: 'The System Is Safe and Better Off As a Result'

Buffalo, New York - December 7, 2017 - With the FAA Reauthorization Bill seemingly on hold in Washington with Congress facing a series of year-end deadlines and other issues, the 'Families of Continental Flight 3407' warned safety advocates and members of the flying public to remain alert to attempts by the regional airlines to water down critical safety enhancements made in the aftermath of the crash under the guise of improving pilot training. The group underlined comments made by FAA Administrator Michael Huerta this fall spotlighting the safety benefit of the new requirements.

"If we've learned one thing about Washington in the past nine years, it's that you can never even think about taking your foot off the gas or relaxing," stated Susan Bourque of East Aurora, New York, who lost her sister and noted 9/11 activist Beverly Eckert in the crash. "When things are seemingly the most quiet, that's when the lobbying machine is kicking into overdrive behind the scenes and in the shadows, and that is most definitely the case here. We will continue our fight to ensure that young pilots not only get the best quality training, but that in this age of increasing automation, they get more, not less, hand-flying experience to develop their stick-and-rudder skills. One only needs to compare the performance of Captain Sullenberger and First Officer Skiles in the 'Miracle on the Hudson' to what happened in the cockpit of Flight 3407 when the auto-pilot disengaged in the midst of what should have been a routine stall warning to realize how much that experience matters."

Speaking to the Southwest Airlines Pilots Association this fall, Huerta spoke at length on the stronger First Officer Qualifications requirements which were enacted by the FAA in 2013 after being unanimously passed by Congress in 2010. His comments included, 'We ... think we've gotten a great safety benefit as a result,' 'Congress was very clear, they wanted to raise the standard,' and 'We believe we have done that (raised the standard), and we believe that the system is safe and better off as a result of that.' "

Where were all these lobbyists with their press releases and committees and calls for these so-called 'safety improvements' 10 years ago when the regional airlines like Colgan were taking all these shortcuts and planes operated by regional airlines were actually crashing," declared John Kausner of Clarence Center, New York, who lost his twenty-four-year-old daughter Ellyce when the plane crashed less than a mile from their family home. "That's when my daughter Elly needed these people to be concerned and engaged; maybe then we wouldn't have had to spend the last nine years coming to Washington over and over to make sure that people do the right thing. Now we've gone nearly nine years without a crash and suddenly we need to do a better job training our pilots? That is a rat you can smell from a mile away. As a lifelong Buffalo Bills fan, no one detests the New England Patriots more than me, but it seems like this is the

equivalent of someone trying to tell Bill Belichick that he needs to do a better job. These safety rules are clearly working; we are counting on President Trump and Secretary Chao to have the good sense to recognize this and save their time, energy, and resources for the many more critical issues that our government has to deal with."