

Call on Transportation Secretary to Sit Down with Group Members

Buffalo, New York - June 8, 2018 - In light of comments made by Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao on Thursday that suggested that heightened experience requirements for entry-level regional airline first officers were creating a pilot shortage, the 'Families of Continental Flight 3407' reacted strongly in support of the rule that has resulted in over nine years of no fatalities on regional aircrafts, the longest such period in our nation's history by over three times. The group members also called on Chao to meet with them and learn more about their loved ones who were lost in the crash, and the group's subsequent quest to ensure that the mistakes that led to Flight 3407 are never allowed to be repeated.

"Plain and simple, if you are going to blindly accept the talking points of the regional airline lobbyists who have been raking in millions of dollars spreading this false narrative around Washington, please at least give us the courtesy of hearing our perspective, like Secretaries LaHood and Foxx did," stated Scott Maurer of Palmetto, Florida, who lost his thirty year old daughter Lorin. "Better yet, give Sully Sullenberger a call, and ask him to repeat his testimony to Congress about the importance of having an experienced co-pilot like Jeff Skiles at his side, when there is no time for a conversation and you simply must rely on the experience and fundamental flying skills of the pilot in the right seat. Lorin boarded a plane with a captain who was first hired by a bottom feeder regional airline with barely 600 hours of experience, and years later, we learned the hard lesson about the importance of ensuring that all pilots have a great foundation of the basic principles of airmanship like reacting to a simple aerodynamic stall. The bottom line is that experience matters. Shame on us if we go backwards to the days of taking shortcuts and cutting corners, all in the name of making a few more bucks."

The family group also reiterated the regional airline industry's sterling safety record in the aftermath of crash, in large part due to the landmark aviation safety law that was passed by Congress in its aftermath.

"Secretary Chao alluded to a 'corollary impact' of this critical safety rule creating a shortage of pilots for these regional airlines," stated Karen Eckert of Williamsville, New York, who lost her sister Beverly Eckert, a noted 9/11 widow and activist. "What about the corollary effect of there being no crashes because there aren't any inexperienced pilots in these aircrafts any more? This comprehensive legislation raised the bar for regional airlines in the areas of pilot qualifications, fatigue, training, and safety management systems, and we have gone from a decade with 6 regional airline crashes to nearly a decade with zero. The results speak for themselves."

Finally, the group agreed with Chao that any changes to the rule would have to be at the direction of Congress, and highlighted the strong bipartisan Congressional support for these safety requirements.

"This law was the result of a concerted bipartisan 'robust discussion' under the leadership of Congressmen Oberstar, Mica, Costello, and Petri, and Senators Rockefeller, Hutchison, Dorgan, and DeMint - with plenty of technical input from industry experts," stated 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 his family home. "It was unanimously passed by Congress, which is no small feat in these times, and retains strong bipartisan support to this day. We have full confidence that Congress will continue to do the right thing and abide by this law and its strong safety record. To the nay-sayers who are seemingly hell-bent on tearing it down and blaming it for this alleged pilot shortage, I scratch my head and ask if we would ever consider lessening the requirements of medical school if there was a shortage of doctors? Absolutely not! So my suggestion to the regional airlines is simple: take the millions that you are spending on lobbyists and put that towards better working conditions and initiatives to attract young people to the profession. That is where the true solution lies to any challenges that you may be facing. I look forward to sharing my thoughts on these issues with Secretary Chao, and more importantly, to letting her know what a wonderful baby girl I lost on Flight 3407."