

Capt. Tim Canoll, president, Air Line Pilots Association, Int'l
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"Airline Pilots: Trained for Life
View from the cockpit: what will it take to safely ensure our future supply of airline pilots?"

As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you for that kind introduction, Margaret, and for the opportunity to get out of the office this afternoon. I've been an airline pilot for 28 years. I keep current and fly the MD-88 as often as I can. And like every airline pilot, my favorite workplace is in the cockpit, but, if I can't be there, I'm very glad to be here with you today.

A few weeks ago, you couldn't turn on the television, pick up a paper, or check your social media feed without seeing the news that 2017 was the safest year on record for commercial passenger air travel.

Across the globe, we had no commercial passenger jet aircraft fatalities. This tremendous worldwide achievement made people pause and reflect on the tremendous work each of us in this industry does to keep flying safe.

But as impressive as this one-year global record is, here in the United States, we've accomplished this each of the last nine years. That's right, nine years in a row without a single airline passenger fatality because of an accident.

So how did we get here?

How have we created and maintained the safest mode of transportation the world has ever known? And I do mean "we." I don't think I'm exaggerating when I say that everyone in this room has played a part, including the 59,000 men and women of the Air Line Pilots Association, International.

As the largest nongovernmental aviation safety organization in the world, ALPA has worked throughout our history to make flying safer. From our union's beginnings more than 85 years ago, safety has been the foundation of our work—and for good reason.

In the early days of commercial flight, working as an airline pilot was, simply put, extremely dangerous. As a testament to this, more than half of ALPA's founders died in airline accidents. The idea of "Schedule with Safety" literally meant survival for the first pilots. As a result, it became our union's founding principle.

I'm confident that ALPA's commitment to safety, security, and pilot assistance are among the reasons that flying is the safest mode of transportation today.

So is the fact that every airline pilot is "Trained for Life."

For all of us, experience matters in both our careers and our personal lives. Whether it's your first time driving a car, your first time working on the Hill, or one of your first times trying to get your point across to hundreds of airline industry professionals while they are eating dessert, we all understand there's a difference in how we perform when it's something new versus when it's something we've already experienced.

The same applies for airline pilots. Experience counts when operating complex equipment in a changing environment. So does constantly maintaining and sharpening our skills and judgement through training.

When it comes to experience, a pilot gathers information with his or her senses about both the environment and the aircraft that cannot be simulated in training. This means learning how to use the physical experience of being at the controls to help ensure safe operations. It's learned over time, and there are no shortcuts.

To reinforce flight experience and skills, airline pilots also make a career-long commitment to training. Training comes in many forms, from initial training and recurrent programs to checkrides and the training required as new regulations are put in place.

As a way to shed a little light on what it takes to learn and maintain the skills needed to be an airline pilot, ALPA has launched a new public-awareness campaign to help underscore just how much airline pilots are "Trained for Life."

Unlike the early days of our industry, airline accidents today are rare. When they do happen, our industry—probably more than any other—learns all we can and does everything possible to prevent a similar accident from occurring in the future.

For example, when four fatal airline accidents occurred in the United States in over a six-year period, Congress took action to make flying safer. With the help and support of many in this room, our elected representatives responded to these tragedies by passing the Airline Safety and FAA Extension Act of 2010.

At Congress's direction, the FAA reviewed the four accidents along with others. It found that shortcomings in airline pilot experience, qualification, and training had been factors in all of them.

The set of FAA regulations that resulted from the law's passage improved the training pilots receive in important areas. These include flying in adverse weather and icing, recognizing and recovering from upsets and stalls, and mentoring other crewmembers. The rules also updated pilot certificate and type-rating requirements.

Such a far-reaching modernization of aviation safety regulations had not occurred since the mid-1990s. The results, well, they quite simply speak for themselves: In the 20 years prior to the congressional action, more than 1,100 passengers lost their lives in airline accidents. Since Congress acted, that number has been reduced to zero.

ALPA has been proud to stand with the families of Colgan Flight 3407, whose tireless advocacy has helped turned tragedy into safer skies.

I am deeply honored to have with us Ken and Mary Ellen Mellett. Mr. and Mrs. Mellett lost their son, Coleman, in that terrible accident. We owe them a debt of gratitude for their determined effort to make flying safer for all of us. Thank you for being here today.

In addition to the Colgan families, the coalition fighting to maintain these safety rules includes more than 100,000 airline pilots who are united in the cause.

ALPA is aware that there are those who believe that we can reduce training hours and keep flying safe. We simply don't agree.

The current system allows credit hours for different levels of training and flight-hour experience. This system is working to keep our industry safe. And we're not willing to gamble with our passengers' safety to run some policy experiment pulled from a white paper or a power point presentation.

Airline pilots fly the planes. We protect our passengers. And we "train for life" to keep the public safe and our industry strong.

So take it from us, please, your pilots, experience saves lives.

Think about it this way: None of us would want to go to a surgeon who has only some of the qualifications. By the same token, I don't think the flying public wants to get on an airplane with a pilot who has some of the training and experience when it comes time to safely perform the required maneuvers.

As demonstrated by the Miracle on the Hudson and the tens of thousands of flights that take place every day, airline pilots are "Trained for Life." All who depend on air transportation are safer as a result.

Now let me make one other thing perfectly clear: no one is more committed than we are to ensuring we have enough qualified and experienced pilots to keep the aviation industry strong and competitive.

The good news is that we currently have more fully qualified pilots in the United States than there are commercial positions available. That said, forecasts show that thousands more qualified airline pilots will be needed in the future.

So how do we make sure we have the pilots we need down the road and for decades to come? One important element is protecting our industry's extraordinary safety record. Safety is inextricably linked with the success and growth of U.S. air transportation. Safety must be as much a part of the future of the U.S. airline industry as it has been a part of its past.

In the upcoming FAA reauthorization and through other avenues, ALPA will pursue our members' goals in advancing all aspects of aviation safety, security, and pilot assistance.

For example, ALPA will highlight ways we can do more to enhance the safety of transporting lithium batteries by air. We'll also work to eliminate the risk from—and this word is important—"undeclared" dangerous goods that, because they are improperly labeled or packaged, could also cause uncontrollable fires on board aircraft.

No official estimates exist for the number of undeclared dangerous goods shipped by air. But hundreds of hazmat incidents occur each year that, when investigated, eventually point to undeclared dangerous shipments.

ALPA is working with the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration to advance a four-part solution to safeguard air transportation. It includes education about and enforcement of existing laws, increasing packaging requirements, creating stiffer penalties, and strengthening international rules and guidelines.

To maintain our industry's high level of safety, we also must ensure the safe integration of unmanned aircraft systems. We know from recent close calls that UAS pose a serious risk—and it's growing.

As a result, ALPA commends recent action by Congress to enable the FAA to require all UAS operators to be registered, so that we can locate the responsible individuals if necessary.

But now we need to fix the loophole that prevents the FAA from regulating UAS used by hobbyists by repealing Section 336 of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2012. Hobbyists who are compliant really have no reason for concern—we know they already respect the rules.

We can also enhance safety by installing secondary cockpit barriers and do more to protect the data collected through voluntary safety reporting programs.

ALPA pilots take tremendous pride in the contribution to the safety of air transportation that we've made, along with many other stakeholders, including each of you in this room. We know pilots in the future will want to become part of a U.S. airline industry that is no less safe.

Attracting new pilots to the profession also means that the U.S. airline industry must offer aviators good salaries, a healthy work-life balance, and predictable career progression.

One-time bonuses are no substitute for long-term contract improvements that pilots can count on as they pay for school and raise their families. We've made some progress recently in providing appropriate compensation, but more needs to be done.

In one recent example, Endeavor pilots ratified a contract that converts one-time hiring and retention bonuses into higher rates of pay for the duration of a long-term agreement. It responds to a modern market. And, guess what? Endeavor is having no problem filling cockpits with qualified pilots.

Another essential factor in attracting pilots to our industry is making certain that U.S. airlines have a fair and equal opportunity to compete internationally. ALPA will never let up in our fight against the atypical business models and foreign government subsidies that both threaten our airlines' ability to compete as well as our careers.

The principle of fair competition in the economic marketplace has long been at the core of air service agreements between the United States and its trading partners. This includes its Open Skies agreements with Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. U.S. policy is squarely premised on a market that is undistorted by government interference.

ALPA is hopeful because the Trump administration recently took initial steps to end such unfair trade practices and allow American workers to compete on a level playing field.

Take it from me, U.S. airline workers can go up against any foreign airline, as long as the competition is fair.

Over the coming weeks, we'll watch closely to determine whether Qatar does take steps to end its subsidies. It must also embrace a transparent business model that reflects internationally accepted accounting and true auditing standards.

Now the administration must stand firm on enforcing the U.S. Open Skies agreement with the United Arab Emirates. The United States must demand that the UAE comes into compliance with its Open Skies agreement and stops subsidizing its airlines.

Addressing the economics of what is needed to position individual airlines to attract the best and brightest to work for them and ensuring fair competition for U.S. airlines internationally is an essential start.

But there's more we can do to attract new and retain qualified and experienced pilots in our industry.

First, we can make certain that U.S. military veterans can easily and affordably transition into an airline pilot career. We applaud the Department of Transportation and Secretary Elaine Chao's commitment to making it easier for our veterans to work in the best industry in the world. Our union stands ready to assist others in breaking down barriers that may impede them from pursuing careers in aviation, while maintaining the highest standards of safety.

We should also reform federal student loan programs to make it easier for young people to pursue careers as aviators. Lawmakers can move legislation to increase the borrowing limits for loans for flight training for students who are pursuing airline transport pilot certificates or ATPs.

Our industry can also do more to reach out to new audiences and encourage them to consider an airline pilot or aviation career.

At ALPA, we continue to build on our decades of outreach to aviators and students of all ages to promote the piloting profession.

Every year, our pilots attend events such as AirVenture at Oshkosh, the Organization of Black Aerospace Professionals Annual Convention, the National Gay Pilots Association Industry Expo, and the International Women in Aviation Conference. In addition, hundreds of ALPA volunteers visit primary and secondary schools each year and participate in community events to encourage students to look into becoming a pilot.

And we've launched, with others in the industry including many organizations here today, Aviation Works 4U, a one-stop shop for exploring pathways to a career in the industry.

I hope it's clear that ALPA is doing more than ever to inspire the next generation of airline pilots. We're also focused on how our government and industry can do more to provide safe, reliable air service to communities all across America, including those in rural areas.

With safety always as the top priority, there's more work to be done.

As a start, Congress should ask the DOT to convene a separate working group to review eligible Essential Air Service markets. We must also factor with greater weight whether a city is a state capital as we evaluate potential EAS recipients. Lawmakers must also fund the Small Community Air Service Development Program in its entirety.

Our government and industry has these and many other opportunities to safely foster air service in rural America. ALPA is eager to continue to work with Congress, the DOT, and our industry partners to achieve these goals.

I hope you share my optimism today as we step back and consider the U.S. airline industry's incredible safety record.

In 2017, we celebrated the fact that we had the safest year on record globally. We should leave here today taking tremendous pride in our work together to achieve this not once, but nine years in a row here in the United States.

Together, we've done something very meaningful: we've saved lives and we've made our industry stronger in the process. We all know this didn't happen by accident. We know it wasn't easy.

It happened because, as an industry, we came together, petitioned our government and passed life-saving measures to keep flying safe. Let's make the same commitment today not to go backwards. Not to settle for less. Not to find shortcuts or work-arounds. Let's continue to do the hard work of making air travel the safest mode of transportation in the world.

ALPA believes—and history shows—that a well-qualified, fully trained, and adequately rested pilot at the controls of our airliners is critical to continuing this safety record. I commit to you today that ALPA will never stop upholding this principle because it provides confidence to our passengers and shippers, value to our companies, and economic might to this country.

No one is more committed than ALPA to securing an adequate supply of airline pilots for the future with safety held as the highest standard. So on behalf of the 59,000 pilots of ALPA, thank you for your focus on safety and for the enthusiasm we share for making certain that the safest place on Earth will always be in the air.

It's been a real pleasure to be here today.