

December 16, 2015

The Honorable John Thune
Chairman
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
United States Senate
511 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Nelson
Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
United States Senate
716 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kelly Ayotte
Chairman
Subcommittee on Aviation Operations,
Safety, and Security
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
United States Senate
144 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Aviation Operations,
Safety, and Security
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
United States Senate
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Thune, Ranking Member Nelson, Chair Ayotte, and Ranking Member Cantwell:

We are writing to urge you and your colleagues to ensure that small- and medium-sized communities in your states continue to have safe and reliable commercial air service. Specifically, we are asking you to address the current pilot shortage when you consider legislation to reauthorize the Federal Aviation Administration.

Small- and medium-sized communities around the country are continuing to experience commercial air service reductions, in part, because carriers report that there are not enough qualified pilots to operate their flights. This summer, a major airline reduced service between Tulsa and two of the carrier's hubs. Airline officials attributed the Tulsa cuts to the pilot shortage and new mandated qualification requirements. Unfortunately, many other communities are dealing with similar circumstances.

As you know, first officers must now accumulate 1,500 hours of flight time to receive an Airline Transport Pilot (ATP) certificate. This new requirement has dramatically increased both the time and cost of becoming a commercial airline pilot. Unfortunately, the greater financial burden and debt associated with becoming a commercial airline pilot are deterring many young people from pursuing a career in aviation.

Regional airlines and the small communities they serve are feeling the brunt of the pilot shortage. Some small communities have lost all commercial air service because there are not enough pilots. According to the InterVistas Consulting Group, more than 30 communities that had commercial air service in 2013 no longer have access to our national aviation system today. Needless to say, communities often face severe economic repercussions when carriers decide to reduce or eliminate commercial air service.

With large numbers of pilots expected to retire in the next several years the pilot shortage crisis is expected to become even more severe. InterVistas estimates that 16,000 pilots at the big four U.S. carriers will retire between now and 2022. In 2013, Boeing estimated that airlines around the world will need to hire almost 500,000 pilots by 2032 or about 25,000 annually. To complicate matters, the United States may continue to lose pilots to foreign carriers.

The regional airlines have developed a thoughtful plan that would create an alternative pathway for first officers to receive a restricted ATP while maintaining the highest levels of safety. The program is designed to better prepare pilots

for the rigors of demanding airline training and operations rather than relying on flight hours alone. The regional airlines maintain that this approach would provide a more meaningful and quantifiable measure of experience for pilot training.

The regional airlines also make a compelling case that their proposal would enhance aviation safety, attract more pilots, and reduce the negative impact on service to small- and medium-size communities. They maintain that their "selective, structured, and targeted" training program would enhance the content of the candidate's educational and aeronautical experience. In other words, the proposed training program would focus on the quality of flight time hours instead of the quantity.

As more and more communities around the country experience air service reductions because of the pilot shortage, the imperative for Congressional action grows. The regional airlines have a plan that would enhance aviation safety and address the pilot shortage. As you prepare to consider the next FAA reauthorization bill, we encourage you to fully consider the proposal and other options that would help communities that are struggling to maintain and attract new commercial air service.

All of us -- airlines, airports, other aviation stakeholders, Congress, and the Administration -- need to work together to ensure that there are enough pilots in the pipeline to accommodate rising demand and attrition. Working together we can also ensure that people who live in small- and medium-sized communities continue to have access to our national aviation system. We are convinced that this can be accomplished in a way that enhances safety as well.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



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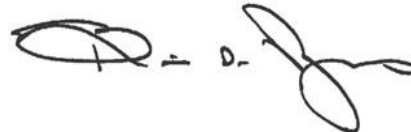
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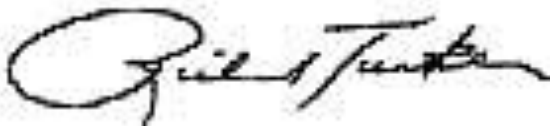
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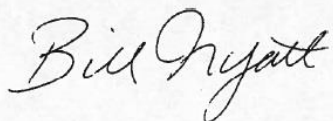
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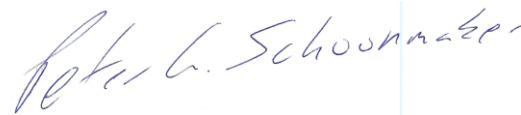
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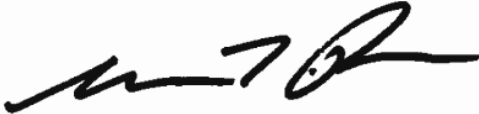
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