

“Developing the Aviation Workforce of the 21st Century”
U.S. Senate Commerce Committee Field Hearing
United Aviate Academy, Phoenix Goodyear Airport, Goodyear, Ariz.
Statement of F/O Paul Ryder
Friday, May 13, 2022

Thank you, Chair Sinema, for holding this hearing today.

I am a 17-year commercial airline pilot who has flown at both regional and mainline carriers. I am currently a first officer on the Boeing 757 and 767 for United Airlines. I feel very fortunate to work in a career that fulfills my passion for flying.

Thanks to you and other lawmakers, because of the Payroll Support Program and its strong worker protections, the United States has enough pilots today to meet demand—in fact, more than 1.5 pilots for every job.

But today’s supply of pilots doesn’t mean that we don’t need to do all we can to build a strong pilot workforce for the future. As a member of the Air Line Pilots Association, Int’l, I can tell you that no organization is more committed to inspiring and supporting the next generation of aviators.

Each year, ALPA connects with thousands of students of all ages. We conduct visits to elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as colleges and universities, air shows, and community events. Our union’s goal is to inspire young people from all backgrounds to see themselves as airline pilots.

ALPA is also working to create an accessible, inclusive airline pilot workforce for all who are interested and for those who have been locked out for too long. Women and people of color in particular face significant barriers to becoming aviators—and that must change.

ALPA has a plan to break down those barriers, create opportunity, and build a strong pipeline of qualified aviators, while protecting the high level of safety in the U.S. air transportation system. Some argue that we must lower standards to open the doors of opportunity—we flatly reject that.

To help aspiring aviators, ALPA is calling on our government to align federal funding for pilot academic education and training with that of other highly skilled professions. We believe:

- The government must do more to provide federal financial assistance for flight training for students pursuing two- and four-year degrees.

- It should provide an opportunity for pilots to work for airlines that serve the public need in exchange for student loan forgiveness.
- The government should also increase subsidized loans for flight training and ensure that unsubsidized loans do *not* accrue interest while students are in school.

To assist academic institutions, the government can provide grants to minority-serving institutions to create or expand aviation and flight-degree programs and help other colleges and universities that serve underrepresented communities create such programs.

On an industry level, airlines can do more to make it easier—and more affordable—to become an airline pilot. I'm proud of the partnership between ALPA pilots at United and United Airlines to create the Aviate Academy. It helps aspiring aviators with the cost of obtaining certification and will provide more enhanced training under the existing requirements.

Unlike during years past, pilots who are starting their career today have many airlines to choose from. Airlines and labor can do more to address the economic and work-life issues that exist at some carriers and help them increase their ability to attract new aviators.

We must also insist on an inclusive workplace for pilots. For example, ALPA is leading the fight to promote inclusive, gender-neutral language in its collectively bargained agreements. We are also advancing inclusive language throughout the industry, including at the FAA's Advanced Aviation Advisory Committee and in our advocacy to change the FAA's use of notice to airmen to notice to air missions.

As the United States works to expand its pilot workforce, it must protect our industry's extraordinary safety record. The success of first officer qualification requirements and pilot training that were developed by the regulator, airlines, and labor have helped make U.S. air transportation the safest in the world. Some suggest we must choose between safety and opportunity. That is a false choice.

Thanks to the federal relief that Congress provided to U.S. airlines, airline pilots are more than ready to meet today's needs. However, we must act to make certain that the pilot workforce of the 21st century is ready for takeoff.