

Testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

Hearing Titled: "Developing the Aviation Workforce of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century"

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Good morning, Chairwoman Sinema, and members of the Committee. I am pleased to be here today to discuss United Airlines and the United Aviate Academy efforts to develop and diversify the aviation workforce and build the greatest airline in the history of aviation. I would like to thank the members of this Committee, Congress, and the federal government for their dedication and commitment to ensuring the future success of this vital part of the U.S. economy.

As you all know, the COVID-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges for the aviation industry at large. Yet, even during some of the most difficult times, we kept our plans squarely focused on the future and made strategic decisions based on the optimistic outlook that demand would ultimately return. Throughout the past two years, strong support for protecting the aviation workforce and saving jobs never wavered and that is why I am speaking to you today.

### **Long-Term Pilot Supply**

As the aviation industry continues to rebound from the impact of COVID-19, we are focused on passengers returning to travel today as well as our long-term growth plans. United will add 500 aircraft to our fleet in the next five years and to meet the demand, United is working hard to ensure a robust workforce, including pilots, flight attendants, and maintenance technicians. Specifically, we have plans to hire and train 10,000 new pilots over the next decade, half of whom will come from our United Aviate Academy cadets. Many of our competitors also plan to hire a large number of pilots in the coming years, so United decided to invest in our future pilots by creating the United Aviate Academy. Our goal is to recruit and train the highest quality, most diverse pilots in the industry. I would also like to thank the United Master Executive Council of the Air Line Pilots Association (UA ALPA) and my fellow witness, Paul Ryder, for their continued partnership to build the best flight academy in aviation.

### **State-of-the-Art United Aviate Academy Facility**

On January 27, 2022, the United Aviate Academy, the only flight school wholly-owned by a major airline, opened at Phoenix Goodyear Airport. The United Aviate Academy has Part 141 approved Private, Instrument, Commercial Single-Engine, Commercial Multi-Engine, Certificated Flight Instructor, Certificated Flight Instructor Instrument, and Multi-engine Instructor certification – the highest quality certification for a flight school. The Academy also holds accreditation from the Department of Education approved Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges (ACCSC).

The United Aviate Academy itself is an ideal environment for students to not only learn but truly thrive in an aviation career. Our 340,000 square-foot facility, which the United Aviate Academy leases from the city of Phoenix, provides aspiring pilots with industry-leading resources, equipment, and accommodations. Other benefits include our fleet of late-model Cirrus SR-20 series single-engine aircraft, which feature advanced safety characteristics; nearly 50,000 square feet of classroom/office space; multiple aircraft hangars; dormitory rooms for student housing with ample room for expansion;

proximity to many auxiliary airfields in the Phoenix area; and most importantly, favorable weather for year-round flight training.

### **The United Aviate Academy's Mission: Love to Fly, Born to Lead**

United Airlines' innovative United Aviate Academy pilot development program provides those who aspire to a career as a United Captain with the most direct route to achieving that goal. The United Aviate Academy is built to accommodate pilots of all experience levels – from those with zero hours to professional pilots already flying for one of United Airlines' regional partners.

For instance, an aspiring aviator who joins the United Aviate Academy in Phoenix with no prior flying experience can become a private, licensed pilot within two months, training we provide for free. Within a year, they can start earning income after receiving their ratings and certificates. Within five years, they can become a United Airlines pilot.

### **Direct Pathways to Becoming a United Airlines Pilot**

Becoming a United Airlines pilot is one of the most lucrative aviation careers currently available. United currently has over 12,000 pilots, and Captains of United's Boeing 787s and 777s can earn more than \$350,000 per year and generous benefits, including one of the highest 401(k) employer contributions in the nation.

In addition to our Aviate Academy, our Aviate program offers a career path program for pilots, with increased transparency and clarity along the path from program entry to flying for United. Once a pilot has completed their training at the Academy or through an Aviate program partner flight school, we offer a variety of next steps in the career path to build quality hours toward their commercial Air Transport Pilot license (ATP). These include options to work as a certified flight instructor or join one of our Part 135 carrier partners. Once a pilot receives their ATP, they can fly for one of the many United Express partners including Mesa, Commute Air, Air Wisconsin, and GoJet. Moreover, we offer improved career development, mentoring, and access to United pilots as well as learning tools and immediate inclusion in the United family, all with access to senior leadership, site visits and tours, and certain travel privileges.

However, for many people, achieving this amount of success is beyond their wildest imagination due to the financial challenges of becoming a pilot. Earning an ATP in the U.S. can cost more than \$100,000 and requires 1,500 hours of flight time. The cost of becoming a pilot is a significant barrier to entry for many, particularly women and people of color. We are working to reduce this barrier at the United Aviate Academy with scholarship programs and innovative financing options through our credit union partnership. United and JPMorgan Chase & Co. have renewed last year's commitment to fund nearly \$2.4 million in scholarships for future aviators attending the United Aviate Academy. But we cannot solve the financial challenge alone and welcome partnership with the government in making aviation careers more accessible to the next generation.

We strongly support continued and enhanced funding for the Aviation Workforce Development Grants for Aircraft Pilots and Aviation Maintenance Technical Workers, which was part of the 2018 FAA reauthorization legislation. Additionally, Congress should pass the Flight Education Access Act that we expect to be introduced this summer. This would provide expanded loan amounts and payment deferral

for pilots and help reduce the financial challenges for those who want to pursue a career as an airline pilot.

### **The United Aviate Academy's Inaugural Class**

Beyond just recognizing the lack of diversity in the aviation field, United Airlines and the United Aviate Academy are taking real action to create change in the industry. Attracting, retaining, and advancing women and people of color in aviation is critical to the U.S. aviation industry's safety, sustainability, and ability to innovate. United leads the industry in the number of pilots who are women and people of color but there is still a long way to go. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 5.6% of pilots across the industry are women and only 6% are people of color.

This past January, the inaugural class of 30 United Aviate Academy students began their studies, 80% of whom are women or people of color, to complete a rigorous, year-long training program that sets them up for a career that reflects United's high standard of professionalism and deep commitment to delivering a safe, caring, dependable, and efficient travel experience. As of April 25, 2022, the United Aviate Academy has more than 15,000 current applications, and more than 10,000 of those applications are from diverse candidates (American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino and not disclosed). More than 4,000 are women – 987 are Black/African American, 858 are Hispanic/Latino, 31 are American Indian/Alaska Native, and 347 are Asian.

For the inaugural class, the United Aviate Academy received more than 7,500 applications from aspiring pilots around the country in less than six months, with nearly 75% of those applicants being women or people of color. After completing their training at the Academy, students can build flight and leadership experience while working within the United Aviate Academy pilot development ecosystem at partner universities, professional flight training organizations, and United Express carriers on their way to becoming United pilots.

In the larger Aviate pathway program, United Airlines has also partnered with historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), Delaware State University, Elizabeth City State University, and Hampton University to identify top talent and recruit them into the United Aviate program. Through the partnership, students will have the opportunity to join the United Aviate Academy and Aviate program and connect with dedicated ambassadors and coaches who will help guide them on the path to a United flight deck.

### **The United Aviate Academy Curriculum Ensures Quality**

The United Aviate Academy is providing top-tier training to all students. The unique curriculum and access to state-of-the-art equipment truly provide an unparalleled training experience that goes above and beyond typical pilot training efforts. United Aviate Academy students are connected with United pilot mentors, they have access to Cirrus aircraft for single-engine, and currently using Seminoles for multi-engine but transitioning the multi-engine fleet to a more advanced aircraft.

The curriculum includes Upset Prevention and Recovery Training (UPRT) which is a comprehensive pilot training program designed to help prevent the #1 fatal threat to air safety – Loss of Control In-Flight (LOC-I). Additionally, Part 121 behavior in a Part 141 training program ensures students are well prepared for careers in the commercial aviation environment, including check rides.

The curriculum, mentoring, and aircraft access are all part of what makes the student experience at the United Aviate Academy so unique and successful.

### **Strategic Partnerships**

The United Aviate Academy and United's Aviate program are built on our important strategic partnerships. We are grateful for our relationship with the United Airlines' Air Line Pilots Association, which plays an integral role in driving more qualified candidates to the doors of the United Aviate Academy and ultimately expanding the pilot pipeline.

In addition to our union partnership, we are also reaching candidates through our partnerships with Sisters of the Skies (SOS), Women in Aviation International (WAI), Organization of Black Aerospace Professionals (OBAP), Latino Pilot Association (LPA), Professional Asian Pilot Association (PAPA), and National Gay Pilots Association (NGPA) – allowing us to engage with potential candidates unlike ever before. By working directly with these organizations, we are able to educate prospective students about the benefits of becoming a pilot and explore scholarship opportunities.

### **Conclusion**

As we look ahead – we envision a robust future for the United Aviate Academy – one that has an even greater impact on the field of aviation than it does today.

United Airlines started the United Aviate Academy in an effort to truly determine its own destiny. We foresee significant and strong demand in the coming decades, and we believe United's growth plan will reach its full potential with the help of the United Aviate Academy recruiting, training, and developing the highest quality of diverse pilots.

Before I close, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the incredible students we have here at the United Aviate Academy. Their dedication to the aviation industry will ensure a successful future not only for United Airlines and the United Aviate Academy, but the greater economy at large.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before this Committee and look forward to answering any questions you may have.