

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 15, 2011

J. Randolph Babbitt
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Babbitt:

We write to respectfully request the timely and complete implementation of recommendations included in the Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, "Initial Pilot Training: Better Management Controls Are Needed to Improve FAA Oversight" (GAO-12-117). In addition, we urge the FAA to move forward with a pilot training rulemaking process in order to adequately prepare first officers for flying regional aircraft.

As you know, we represent Western New York and since the February 12, 2009 crash of Continental Connection Flight 3407 we have worked diligently with our partners throughout government to improve aviation safety. Much of this effort resulted in critical safety recommendations that ultimately served as the framework for The Airline Safety and Federal Aviation Administration Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-216). On September 1, 2009, the Western New York congressional delegation sent the GAO a request to conduct a comprehensive study of flight schools, flight education, and the academic training requirements for certifying an individual as a pilot. That report has recently been released and offers a number of key findings and recommendations.

Of particular concern is the GAO's finding that the FAA may not have completed required annual inspections at 118 of the nation's 545 (21.6 percent) pilot schools. The GAO could not determine whether the FAA was missing data due to poor management of their information database or if the inspections never occurred in the first place. In addition, the GAO could not verify the FAA had performed mandatory annual inspections of pilot examiners, which are used to supplement the FAA's workforce by testing pilot applicants. Some pilot examiners with the highest rates of activity that require two annual inspections had not received an inspection in the previous 12 months. Again, the failure to assure proper oversight of pilot inspectors was attributed to inadequate data and it remains unclear if many of the necessary inspections took place as required.

A significant portion of the GAO's report discussed how commercial pilot certificates do not adequately prepare first officers for flying regional aircraft. Specifically, the section "Pilot Training Requirements for a Commercial Pilot Certificate Have Not Kept Pace with the Complexities of Modern Aircraft and Current Airline Operating Environment" highlights pilot school requirements, which have not been updated since 1997. The first step in protecting the flying public is ensuring commercial pilots are adequately trained before they enter the cockpit.

We urge the FAA to review the GAO's findings, move forward with a pilot training rulemaking process and aggressively address oversight gaps by developing a comprehensive system to measure inspection performance. Thank you for your personal attention to this deeply important issue. We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



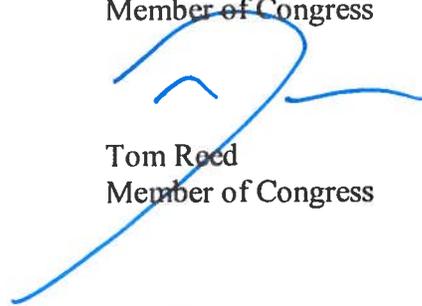
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