

## QUALITY NOT QUANTITY

Chairman Costello, members of the House Aviation Subcommittee, thank you for allowing the aviation educators of the Aviation Accreditation Board International, AABI, and the University Aviation Association, UAA, the opportunity to be heard. These organizations asked me to represent their views before this body. I have the unique privilege of having served as the President of each of these fine organizations.

If I were to place a caption on this testimony, I would title it “Quality not Quantity.” This, I hope, will become clear as my testimony progresses.

The combined institutional membership of both AABI and the UAA is 115 Colleges/Universities, some of whom are members of both organizations. These institutions represent almost 11,000 students involved in academic preparation to become professional pilots, and they create a significant percentage of the professional pilot workforce. A single member institution alone provides one in four of the professional pilots flying air carrier aircraft today in the United States. One in four. Committee members, these are not insignificant numbers.

We applaud the subcommittee for focusing on the safety of the airline industry. We, the aviation educators, have studied H.R. 3371 and find that most of its provisions are sound and will likely achieve the objective of improving air safety. There is one requirement, however, that causes us deep concerns not only for the healthy flow of highly-qualified entry-level first officers into the pilot supply pipeline but also for the safety of the entire system and the very survival of aviation higher education. I’m referring to the Airline Transport Pilot (ATP)-only provision described in Section 10, requiring a pilot to achieve an ATP before being allowed to enter the cockpit of a Part

121 air carrier. This includes both the regional and the major airlines. For a pilot to acquire the ATP, he or she must be at least 23 years of age and have flown at least 1500 hours. Graduates from college and university programs typically have earned the private, commercial, instrument, multi-engine and perhaps the certified flight instructor qualifications, have about 250 to 350 hours of flying time, and are not yet 23 years of age. This bill would require these graduates to spend an unnecessary number of years building their flight time so as to qualify for an entry-level first officer position. One staffer asked me the question, “why don’t you just make 1500 hours part of your curriculum?” There are two reasons:

The first is cost. If we assume that it costs about \$40,000 to complete all of the flight courses (over and above the “normal” costs of tuition, books, and room and board), to increase the flight time to 1500 hours would increase the cost to \$200,000. Few, if any, students could afford that.

Second, the ATP requirement is a quantity-driven requirement that requires little improvement in skills.

The ATP represents quantity not quality.

So what do we know about quality?

To prepare for the theme of the 2008 National Training Aircraft Symposium which was the looming pilot shortage, a pilot yield study was undertaken to determine the quality of new hire first officers entering an air carrier’s training program. At that time, before the economic meltdown, air carriers were hiring low time pilots, but had no empirical performance barometer to tell them which new hire category of first officers would perform best in their training. “Best” meant that the pilot completed the training

with no repeat lessons. “Worst” meant the pilots eventually completed the training but to do so had to repeat more than 9 lessons. The study examined the performance of all 452 new hire first officers for a large regional airline who started air carrier training during 2006 and 2007. The results were eye-opening.

The first officer new hires that performed best were those who had 500 hours of flight time or less and were graduates from AABI-accredited university programs. 72% of the pilots in this category required no extra air carrier training whatsoever. The pilot group who performed next best was prior military pilots.

Committee members, that is “quality”. We have seen it; we have identified it; and we know what it is. Further, I submit that there is a direct relationship between safety and quality, the higher the quality of the entering pilot workforce, the higher the level of safety.

If we were to create a quality scale from one to ten of new hire first officers, with ten being the best, I’m not sure who should be at 9 or 5 or 1. But I do know who should be at 10: the graduates from AABI-accredited colleges and universities or those graduates who can demonstrate that they meet the outcomes required by AABI. AABI outcomes require our students to complete numerous professional flight development courses not required by the FAA; thus, our graduates are not just pilots, but professional pilots, armed with a greater depth and breadth of knowledge and skills.

But, members of the committee, the ATP-only provision of the bill would close the cockpit doors to these high-quality entry-level first officers.

So we are asking you today to remove this provision from the bill or to modify it so that graduates of high-quality programs that meet AABI outcomes are able to enter the

cockpit as entry-level first officers at much lower flight time than the ATP requirement of 1500 hours.

What are the results if you allow the ATP-only provision to remain unchanged in the bill?

The quantity-driven ATP requirement would cause potential students who would normally enter a high quality university program to now seek the shortest route to the first officer's seat. Why would they spend four years at a college or university paying tuition and flight fees when at graduation they still need to fly for another two years to be qualified to enter an air carrier as a first officer trainee?

They wouldn't.

They would seek out local flight training providers, acquire the necessary ratings, and spend the next year or so flying cheap, thirty year old single engine aircraft to build flight time. They would repeat the same flight hour 1000 times over and add no value to the scant knowledge they gained from earlier training. At the end of it, the pilot would take the ATP written and flight exams and be eligible to enter an air carrier training program. These are the types of pilots who scored the worst on the pilot yield study.

On the other hand, graduates from AABI university programs who enter the air carrier cockpit as first officers at, say, 500 hours total time and spend the next 1000 hours with a seasoned captain flying the line, are learning more each day. At the 1500 hour point these first officers are superbly prepared air carrier professionals and are far superior to those who simply built flight time by flying non productive hours just to get to the magic number.

This ATP-only provision bill will fill the cockpits of air carriers with quantity-driven first officers and decimate the robust, high quality flight education programs found at universities all across the country.

For example, the aviation degree program at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota would cease to exist. Just as the program at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale would. Half the students at Embry-Riddle at its campuses in Florida and Arizona would disappear. Auburn's program would close, as would the one at Kent State in Ohio and the program at Central Texas College. The excellent program at Middle Tennessee State University would go away, and so would those at Western Michigan University and Eastern Kentucky University. Future students who would enroll in Southeastern Oklahoma State University's flight education program would need to look elsewhere because the program would be unsustainable and close due to lack of enrollment.

These are just a few examples. In total, the programs at colleges and universities across this great country, which now enroll 11,000 students in flight education programs, would close or suffer. In addition to the impact on flight programs, related aviation programs in management, maintenance, avionics, safety/security, and air traffic control would be adversely affected or closed as institutions lost a critical mass of student enrollments. Committee members, we aviation educators know this; we are the ones closest to the future of aviation education in this country, and we are sounding the alarm.

We ask you to choose quality over quantity and either remove the ATP-only provision from the bill or modify it so that graduates from AABI-accredited institutions or those institutions whose students meet AABI outcomes be allowed to enter the

cockpits of Part 121 carriers at a total flight time significantly reduced from the 1500 hour ATP requirement.

Please don't kill the source of the highest qualified entry-level first officer pilots entering the air carrier workforce. To do so by retaining the ATP-only provision will harm the flow of high quality entry level first officers into the pilot supply pipeline, diminish the safety of the entire system, cripple aviation higher education, and achieve the exact opposite of the intended outcomes of this bill.

Thank you for your attention.