

Ways and Means Testimony – Key Points

Opening: Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Neal, and members of the Ways and Means Committee.

- Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on a dire threat to the American economy.
- There is a shortage of commercial pilots and aviation maintenance technicians, and I have an idea before you to help address the problem.

Talking points:

- A strong commercial aviation industry requires a steady supply of new pilots and aircraft mechanics.
- The high cost of training in these fields deters Americans from choosing these vital careers.
- That's bad news for passengers and anyone expecting to receive deliveries on time.
- Demand for seats and cargo space increases every year.
- Pilot and mechanic recruitment simply aren't keeping up.
- **That's a huge problem for the economy. Commercial Aviation drives 5% of America's GDP - \$1.25 trillion in 2022.**
- We have all felt the effects recently. As air travel goes back to pre-pandemic levels, delays and cancelations are on the rise, and the passenger experience is declining.
- Commercial aviation is a critical part of the U.S. economy, so it's important that we develop and grow the aviation workforce.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Pass the Aviation Workforce Development Act (H.R. 1818)!
- This commonsense legislation helps address aviation workforce shortages by allowing Americans to utilize 529 College Savings Plans to attend FAA-certified commercial pilot and aviation maintenance technician schools.
- As this committee is aware, 529s are a tax-advantaged investment account made up of a taxpayer's own money.
- Often, parents and guardians open them for children to save for a post-secondary education.
- Initially, 529s could only be used at four-year universities, but in recent years, Congress expanded eligibility to apprenticeships in the trades as part of the SECURE Act, which originated in this committee.
- Further expanding 529s to include flight training and mechanic programs would give millions of Americans with 529s the ability to choose a career in aviation, and aspiring aviators another way to save and achieve their dreams.
- **Americans want this! According to the National Flight School Association, most prospective students for pilot programs ask if schools can accept 529s. Federal law says most of them cannot.**
- **That is a serious problem, because the cost to obtain a commercial pilot license and an ATP license often exceeds \$100,000.**
- Middle and low-income Americans are being priced out of vital – and lucrative – careers that keep our economy running.
- All the while, the aviation industry is short tens of thousands of pilots and mechanics according to data from the FAA, DOT, and Department of Labor.

- More are retiring every day.
- **Folks, the Aviation Workforce Development Act has 137 bipartisan cosponsors, including 8 members of this committee.**
- It is endorsed by the entire aviation industry. Airlines large and small, passenger and cargo, pilot and mechanic unions, flight training associations, aircraft manufacturers, and more.
- A large coalition of members of this House and stakeholders agree that it is time to give those who want to pursue a career in aviation, on the ground or in the air, the same tools as those seeking four-year degrees.
- The boarding door is open. It's time to fly!