

Testimony of
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Before the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Aviation
Hearing on U.S. Airways Flight 1549
February 24, 2009

Chairman Costello, Chairman Oberstar, Ranking Members Mica, Petri and members of the committee, I am honored to appear before the Aviation Subcommittee. I too am proud of the fact that I have been involved in aviation for the last 32 years. Both of my parents were pilots before me. I have over 20,000 hours in the cockpit, have flown as Captain at US Airways in the past, and Captain qualified on 3 different transport aircraft types.

While much has been made of cockpit flight crew's actions in this incident, much credit is due to the experienced and highly trained flight attendants, Donna Dent, Doreen Welsh and Sheila Dail. Without their quick, capable and courageous actions, the outcome that day would have been dramatically different. To work with such professionals is truly an honor for me. Also, the captains and crews of the boats that came to our rescue as well as the first responders at the ferry terminals were a great part of the successful outcome. And finally the passengers themselves, who evacuated the airplane in an extremely orderly, selfless and professional manner, deserve much credit. We have been categorized as heroes; if so, there were many, many heroes on that day.

Like each and every one of my fellow professional airline pilots and flight attendants, I realize that flying a commercial airliner is a tremendous responsibility. The aftermath of this incident has brought forth in me a renewed understanding that this is a job for experienced professionals. Being an airline flight crewmember, whether pilot or flight attendant, is a serious job for serious people, and I am tremendously proud to count myself among their number. The dedication, seriousness and professionalism with which we in the aviation community approach our responsibilities can be credited for the dramatic improvement of our national aviation safety record.

The training, procedures and tenets of cockpit resource management (CRM) developed throughout the airline industry over the last 15 years, played a significant role on January 15th. Training departments industry wide are ceaselessly striving to identify future problems and develop procedures to combat them before they occur. A functional self-disclosure safety program is a valuable tool to identify and track errors. Mutually agreeable solutions to make these programs available are in the traveling public's interest. We must work tirelessly to maintain an unrivaled commitment to safety and professionalism. However, another component of the positive result was the vast experience of the cockpit AND cabin crew.

Sully and I have over 70 years of experience and 40,000 flying hours between us. New pilots in the jet aircraft of our affiliate airlines have 300 hours. When I began at US-Airways, the Company required several thousand hours just to gain an interview for a pilot position. It is certainly in the interest of the traveling public to have experienced crews in the cockpit.

Along with Captain Sullenberger, I have concerns for the future of the Airline Pilot Profession. Experienced crews in the cockpit eventually will be a thing of the past. What this country has experienced economically in the last 8 months, we have experienced in our industry for the last 8 years, since 9-11. In the wake of these 8 years of financial turmoil, bankruptcies, layoffs, and revolving door management teams, airline piloting careers have been shattered. I personally earn half of what I once earned, AND I have lost my retirement to a PBGC promise that will pay pennies on the dollar. Many pilots like Captain Sullenberger and myself have had to split their focus from the Airline Piloting Profession and develop alternative businesses or careers. I myself am a general contractor. For the last 6 years, I have worked 7 days a week between my two jobs just to maintain a middle class standard of living.

The more than thirty thousand people who work at US Airways are proud of the work they do each day, and of their accomplishments. To many of us, the near total devaluation of our professions by our management is heartfelt. In the last several years the only constant I see is the ever increasing compensation levels of our management.

When I started in this industry there were aviation dynasties. Entire families would be employed in aviation as pilots, flight attendants, mechanics or agents. An aviation career was something people aspired to their entire childhood, as I did. Now I know of NO ONE who encourages their children to enter the airline industry.

From our perspective, it is clear that the current state of the management/ labor negotiation process is broken. Negotiations drag out for years in stagnation with little clarity for those of us who have spent our entire lives training to be on the front lines of safety for the American flying public. We aren't asking for special privileges, but for a level playing field inside the NMB negotiating process. There is not a balance in the negotiating process and the state of the airline piloting profession is proof.

I would respectfully urge members of this subcommittee to work with other relevant committees to promote better balance between airline management and airline employees, especially in the area of creating an environment for efficient and effective negotiations inside the National Mediation Board process, thereby eliminating years of negotiating stagnation. I believe the reforms being considered by the House Judiciary committee can lead to more cooperation and less confrontation. This in turn would certainly help to rebuild an environment that will allow us to concentrate on the safety of the traveling public.

Our colleagues in this industry have rallied around our incident. While Captain Sullenberger and I generally prefer to land at airports, we are proud that the Hudson River landing displayed what well trained, professional pilots and flight attendants can do when faced with tremendous adversity. We are all very gratified and moved that our colleagues in the flying industry have seen this incident as a positive reflection of themselves and our shared profession.

We must ensure that America's proud aviation traditions of transporting our citizens with safety and security does not fall victim to the immense challenges we face. In this, Congress has a role to play. We hope that you will take seriously the challenges that aviation professional's face by helping us to level the playing field, and working with us to protect the airline pilot profession.

We ask that congress be a partner to the men and woman who make up the professionals who move America every day, as well as the companies who employ us. Working together we can ensure that the flight crews of the future will be the best and the brightest, and will have the experience and training necessary to ensure safe air travel to each and every passenger they carry.