



*Association of Professional Flight Attendants*

*Office of the National President*

**Remarks of APFA National President Bob Ross  
Association of Professional Flight Attendants**

**Building a 21st Century Infrastructure for America:  
Air Transportation in the United States in the 21st Century**

**Submitted for the Record March 8th, 2017**

The Association of Professional Flight Attendants represents over 25,000 American workers and their families, making us the world's largest independent flight attendant union. While many opinions will be expressed during this hearing, it is important that you hear the voice of the 25,000 mainline flight attendants we represent who keep air travel safe every day. We are your first responders and your last line of defense.

**Voice Calls**

Our carrier, American Airlines, is the largest in the world, flying many long haul flights each day and night through one of the most extensive overseas route structures in the industry. As safety professionals who spend countless hours traveling with our passengers and keeping them safe, we see firsthand the dangers of permitting cell phone use for voice calls on our planes. APFA continues to oppose voice calls on planes for several reasons including inflight customer experience, passenger comfort, and most importantly, concerns for safety and security. With air rage already a problem, voice calls will likely contribute to increased irritation among passengers who are looking for privacy and rest. In a worst case scenario, inflight calls could be used by terrorists to coordinate an attack.

Fortunately, we believe we have the support of the flying public who agree that cell phone calls have no place on airplanes and simply wish to travel in peace. To quote House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Bill Shuster himself, "Let's face it, airplane cabins are by nature noisy, crowded, and confined. ....For the most part, passengers are looking for ways to make their flights go by as quickly and quietly as possible. Pilots and flight attendants are focused on ensuring a safe and comfortable flight for everyone onboard." Chairman Shuster and ranking member DeFazio have both spoken out against this bad idea and we urge the Committee to act in a bipartisan manner and reject this concept. While we understand that technology now supports voice calls during flight, that alone does not make it a sound or safe policy. We urge you, in the strongest possible terms, to oppose voice calls in flight. Your safety may one day depend on it.

## **Norwegian Air International**

One issue that we believe deserves your immediate attention is the status of Norwegian Air International's (NAI) foreign air carrier permit. In the final days of the Obama administration, the USDOT effectively signed off on a new paradigm for transatlantic commercial aviation. I do not need to tell you how damaging NAI's planned "flag of convenience" scheme will be to the American aviation industry. The NAI model is tantamount to the outsourcing of good American jobs, the likes of which irreparably undermined America's maritime industry a generation ago. Skirting long-established labor and safety rules also harms American workers and the aviation industry as a whole. The new paradigm is a threat to not just flight crews but the hundreds of thousands of American airline employees as it flies in the face of US-European Open Skies Agreement which expressly forbids such a practice.

I have written to the Department of Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao urging her to overturn the recent decision to allow NAI to operate in the United States. I have also enlisted the help of our 25,000 members to demand that the Department of Transportation overturn this eleventh hour ruling. While NAI on its own represents a threat to our business and livelihoods, the approval also opens the door for more foreign air carriers to do the same. This must be stopped. American jobs are at stake. If we are to avoid a similar fate as the merchant marine, Congress will need to act swiftly.

I urge you in the strongest possible terms to immediately review the arguments that APFA and others have made and reverse this eleventh-hour decision. President Trump rightly called on federal agencies to halt non-essential rulemaking until his administration was firmly in place. This decision on the part of the outgoing Transportation Secretary was an outright rejection of that request and slap in the face of the hard working men and women who have built the finest commercial aviation system in the world. Hundreds of thousands of American workers are counting on you to stand up for American workers to keep the playing fields level. As we have proven time and again, when the competition is fair, American workers win!

President Trump campaigned on putting American workers and American trade deals first. This is the perfect time for the President to start standing up for US workers. NAI cannot be allowed to increase profit by skirting the rules and we urge the Committee to join in the fight for fairness. APFA will continue to speak out against NAI until their permit is revoked and the labor and safety rules ensure a level playing field.

## **Open Skies**

The Open and Fair Skies Agreement must be enforced. At issue are the \$50 billion in subsidies that three Gulf carriers, Emirates, Etihad and Qatar, have received from their governments since 2004. Most recently, Emirates announced they will fly the EWR – ATH—DBX (Newark-Athens-Dubai) route. If history is any guide, we can expect this route to be marketed as a non-stop flight and for the carrier to offer deeply discounted fares, subsidized by the treasury of Dubai. The same thing happened when Emirates started the JFK – MXP flight, flooding the route with capacity and undercutting American, Delta, and United fares by 50% (they offered two tickets for the price of one on the US carriers). While consumers may appear to initially benefit the long term damage to the health of industry is significant.

It is clear that Emirates intends to continue to leverage fifth freedom flights. Article 17 bis of US-European Agreement recognizes the “benefits that arise when open markets are accompanied by high labour standards” and that the Agreement is not intended to undermine them. US-based airlines and workers stand united on this and deserve an equal opportunity to compete in the international market. In fact, President Trump has said that he will enforce our international agreements and we hope and expect that he will stand up to the Gulf carriers and defend the rights of the hard-working Americans he represents. We must enforce this Agreement and require the Gulf coast carriers to play by the same rules, or else the American aviation industry and its workers will suffer.

### **Aviation Regulations**

One issue that we consider to be of the utmost importance for this committee’s attention is the so called "one in, two out" Executive Order on regulations signed by President Trump. The United States leads the world in aviation safety and it has done so since the earliest days of flight. One of the reasons we are the safest in the world is because the safety agencies, the regulators, the air carriers, and the labor unions have worked together in a data-driven effort to eliminate aviation accidents. The US can tout the safest aviation system in the world precisely because of the regulators who understand the safety concerns and the operators who take them seriously. The regulation of flight has not been onerous; rather it has saved lives and kept our industry as the world leader.

Over the years this committee has played a pivotal, non-partisan role in keeping our skies safe. Whether it has been a Democrat or Republican leading this committee, the bottom line has always been safety. My hope is that this committee will provide aggressive oversight to this Executive Order's implementation and will not allow the safety and health standards that we all have fought for to be undercut. This type of knee-jerk pandering should not apply to aviation safety regulations and the safety of our system should not be weighed for political benefits. The flying public has a right to know that safety always comes before politics. APFA hopes this committee will consider holding oversight hearings on this topic as it is implemented to ensure our system is not compromised.

This concludes my remarks. Thank you.



Robert A. Ross  
APFA National President