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Unions at American Airlines Laud Bill Protecting Aviation Careers and Passengers' Safety

FORT WORTH, Texas (July 10, 2019) – Four large unions representing more than 70,000 workers at American Airlines applauded Rep. Peter DeFazio for introducing H.R. 3632, the Fair and Open Skies Act, to prevent the undermining of labor standards in the aviation industry.

This legislation would prohibit the Department of Transportation from issuing a permit to a foreign airline unless DOT determines the airline is not a "flag of convenience carrier." The bill defines that phrase as "a foreign air carrier that is established in a country other than the home country of its majority owner or owners in order to avoid regulations of the home country." Flag-of-convenience schemes are typically used to reduce labor costs.

"Flags of convenience threaten the career prospects of pilots, flight attendants, and other employees across the airline industry, and that employment insecurity in turn threatens passenger safety," said Capt. Eric Ferguson, president of the Allied Pilots Association. "Because they don't directly employ their pilots but instead use third-party staffing agencies, flag-of-convenience airlines never develop a proper safety culture, since their pilots too often fear retribution for voicing safety-related concerns."

"The Association of Professional Flight Attendants thanks Chairman DeFazio for introducing the Fair and Open Skies Act, a critical piece of legislation that would protect airline safety and uphold crucial labor standards," said Lori Bassani, national president of the Association of Professional Flight Attendants. "We stand with our union brothers and sisters in advocating for this bill which would prohibit flag-of-convenience carriers from skirting labor and safety regulations that are meant to keep passengers and crew safe."

"Flag-of-convenience airlines threaten safety, drive down salaries, and worsen the passenger experience," said John Samuelson, international president of the Transport Workers Union. "These airlines are yet another attack on airline workers by greedy airline bosses who care more about profits than they do about safety, fairness, or common decency."

"Flags of convenience have devastated working conditions in the maritime industry," said Sito Pantoja, general vice president of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers. "We must do all we can to prevent these schemes, which are designed to avoid taxes, abuse lax safety standards, and exploit poor labor regulations, from infecting our airline industry. The IAM thanks Rep. DeFazio for his leadership role in this fight."

Rep. DeFazio, chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, introduced a similar bill two years ago that garnered 137 co-sponsors. The language of that bill was eventually included in the Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization Act of 2018, which the House overwhelmingly passed. However, the language was struck from the final draft during negotiations with the Senate.

The Allied Pilots Association — the largest independent pilots union in the United States — represents the 15,000 pilots of American Airlines, including several hundred pilots on full-time military leave of absence serving in the armed forces.

The Association of Professional Flight Attendants is the largest independent flight attendant union proudly representing the 28,000 flight attendants at American Airlines.

The Transport Workers Union represents more than 150,000 members across the airline, railroad, transit, universities, utilities, and services sectors.

The International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers represents more than 100,000 airline members in North America.

American Airlines is the world's largest passenger carrier.