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Raising pilot retirement age poses 'risk' to commercial flying, union argues

American Airlines' pilot union argued the change would exacerbate training backlog

By Daniella Genovese | FOXBusiness |



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Mesa Airlines Chairman and CEO Jonathan Ornstein tells Stuart Varney how his company's initiative to give pilots interest-free loans to fly the number of hours needed to obtain their pilot's license will help the pilot shortage.

The [Allied Pilots Association](#) (APA) is pushing back against legislation that could raise the retirement age for pilots, saying it would "introduce additional risk into commercial aviation."

The Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act, if passed, would reauthorize funding for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and aviation safety and infrastructure programs for the next five years. The current funding for the FAA expires in September.

The bill includes an amendment that would raise the mandatory retirement age for pilots from 65 to 67, according to the APA, which represents [15,000 American Airlines pilots](#).

PILOT SHORTAGE PUTS PRESSURE ON AIRLINE OPERATIONS

The government raised the retirement age in 2007 from 60 to 65.

The [bipartisan bill](#) was introduced by Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Sam Graves, R-Mo., earlier this month. Graves argued that the bill is critical "to making the entire system safer and more efficient for all users and the traveling public."

The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee approved the nearly 800-page bill earlier this month. It will head to the floor of the entire House next month.



American Airlines airplanes parked at John F. Kennedy International Airport ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday in New York, on Nov. 23, 2022. (Michael Nagle/Bloomberg via / Getty Images)

However, Pilots Association Communications Chair Dennis Tajer told FOX Business in a statement that "raising the retirement age is seen as a quick fix to a human infrastructure failure but will only complicate the situation versus providing a long-term fix."

Tajer argued that the idea is "unstudied, untested and unwise" but "some in Congress are willing to try to test it with passengers onboard for sake of commercial interests."

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Tajer, who has spent more than three decades flying for American Airlines, also noted that this change wouldn't align with the international law on pilot retirement, which is currently 65, further complicating matters.

"If we change ours to 67, pilots would be corralled into [flying only within the United States](#), causing our international pilots to move back to domestic airplanes and routes," Tajer said.

Travelers check flight information screens at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago, Feb. 22, 2023. (Nam Y. Huh / AP Images)

The Air Line Pilots Association, International, the largest pilot union in the world, reiterated the same concerns as Tajer.

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ALPA President Jason Ambrosi said in March that the change would not only worsen "the [post-COVID training backlog](#) by using much-needed training cycles to train pilots over 65," but it would also increase costs for airlines and "introduce unnecessary risks" to travelers and crew members.

He argued the move would betray "a fundamental understanding of airline industry operations, the pilot profession and safety."

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