



**Airlines for America**

We Connect the World

Testimony

**Commercial Airline Safety Oversight**

Testimony of  
Thomas L. Hendricks  
Senior Vice President For Safety, Security and Operations  
Airlines for America  
before the  
U.S. House of Representatives,  
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure,  
Subcommittee on Aviation

**April 25, 2012**

Chairman Petri, Ranking Member Costello and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting A4A to appear at this important and timely hearing.

At the outset, I want to express our thanks to the Committee for its leadership in aviation safety and its support of the initiatives that I will discuss this morning, many of which were addressed in the recently enacted *FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012*. Of course, we also appreciate the efforts of the Federal Aviation Administration and the National Transportation Safety Board.

Safety underpins every aspect of airline operations. The remarkable safety record of the airline members of A4A demonstrates their unflinching commitment to fulfilling that responsibility. As a former airline captain, I have repeatedly witnessed that commitment.

The results are extraordinary – this is the safest era in our history. We are the safest form of transportation on the planet, bar none. Importantly, our safety record is neither random nor unintended. We have achieved levels of aviation safety that other industries and foreign civil-aviation authorities envy.

While our commitment to safety is unchanging, the way we pursue safety has evolved and transformed over time as our understanding of human factors has grown, technology has advanced, and our ability to capture and utilize data has expanded. This transformation has been indispensable in producing our extraordinary safety record.

In simplest terms, we operate at a higher level of safety because we have become much better at identifying and managing risk. We haven't conquered risk – no one can promise that in aviation. But throughout their operations, airlines have introduced very potent data-driven risk-assessment systems. These systems are tailored to an individual airline's operations. However, there is a common methodology to them: hazards are identified and rigorously analyzed, and risk-mitigation measures are carefully thought out and implemented.

Risk assessment has been used in aviation for many years. What has changed since the 1990s is the volume and accessibility of operational data that can be applied to safety issues. Airline safety professionals work in an information-rich environment.

That means that we now rely on data-driven analysis, which frequently involves the combined scrutiny of the FAA, employees and management. This yields a high-definition picture, if you will, of operating environments and transient events, and thus more refined risk assessments. And, as the Subcommittee knows, some of the most effective of these safety-data programs are voluntary. They are very tangible manifestations of the industry's willingness to explore new means and develop new relationships within the aviation community to improve safety. In short, a cultural shift has occurred that promotes and enables a higher level of safety.

Data-based programs enable us to identify emerging patterns and promptly deploy focused resources. And when that action is taken also has changed over the years. Today, unlike in past decades, there is an increasing emphasis on initiating change, rather than simply reacting to events. That is proactive safety.

This disciplined approach – going where the data take us and acting accordingly – has significantly advanced safety. It produces the most responsive and effective results. And it facilitates the most efficient deployment of finite resources in making necessary changes.

This discipline gives us the confidence to undertake change when warranted. But it also gives us the ability to recognize when change is uncalled-for and to challenge assumptions, no matter how widely they may be embraced. Not every new idea is an improvement or free of unintended consequences. The proposed FAA rule on pilot certification and qualification requirements, for example, concerns us for these reasons.

I want to inject some words of caution. All who are involved in aviation safety need to realize the importance of sticking to the disciplined approach that I have just outlined. We must resist the temptation to tinker with the safety system, lest we disturb what we have accomplished – and the benefits of that to our passengers and crew members. Expertise and rigor should guide us.

Going forward, we have the tools to continue to foster safety enhancements. That is because today's airline safety culture in the United States is characterized by:

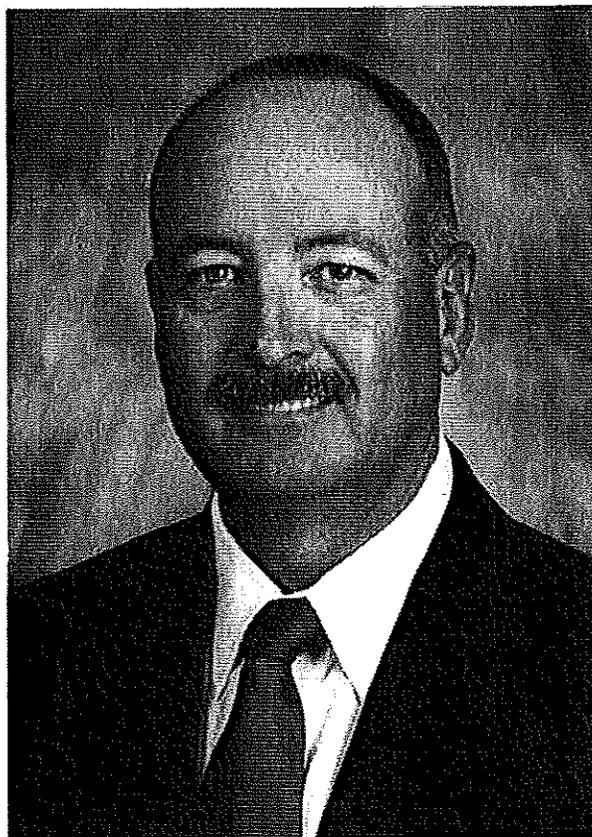
- First, a common understanding that safety is the foundation of our business;
- Second, robust communication within airlines – including with employees – and among industry and government stakeholders based on mutual trust; and
- Finally, recognition that safety-issue precursors can be identified and effective preventive actions taken.

When we look beyond our borders, the situation appears more mixed. Many foreign airlines and civil-aviation authorities have adopted data-driven approaches to safety. The maturity of those systems, however, can vary. Because of that, we urge the U.S. Government to continue its efforts at the International Civil Aviation Organization and in other venues to expand the use of safety-data systems worldwide. This advocacy helps not only foreign airlines but also the American citizens who fly on them.

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We look forward to continuing to work with the Subcommittee on these matters.

**Thomas L. Hendricks**  
**Senior Vice President, Safety, Security and Operations**  
**Airlines for America**



Tom Hendricks was named senior vice president of safety, security and operations for Airlines for America (A4A), formerly the Air Transport Association (ATA), in February 2011. In this role, he is responsible for technical and operational functions of A4A, developing and shaping A4A member positions on flight operations, safety, engineering, air traffic management and security. In addition, he leads A4A's efforts in cargo, passenger facilitation, airport infrastructure and passenger service standards. He co-chairs both the ADS-B In Aviation Rulemaking Committee and the Working Subcommittee of the NextGen Advisory Committee. Tom also serves on the Executive Committee of the Commercial Aviation Safety Team and the Executive Board of Aviation Safety Information Analysis and Sharing System. Hendricks joined ATA as vice president, operations and safety in April 2010.

Prior to joining A4A, Tom oversaw day-to-day flight operations at Delta Air Lines as director of line operations. As a captain, Hendricks previously served as a chief pilot in Atlanta and represented Delta on several key industry groups. He has extensive line flying experience on the Boeing 767-300ER, DC-9, Boeing 727, Lockheed L-1011 Tri Star and MD-88 aircraft.

A retired Air Force Reserve colonel and career fighter pilot, Hendricks also served on active duty as a United States Navy officer on the USS MIDWAY (CV-41) and as an instructor pilot at the United States Navy Fighter Weapons School. A native of Fairfield, Ohio, Hendricks graduated from The Citadel in Charleston, S.C. with a Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics with Secondary Emphasis in Business Administration.

**COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE**  
*Truth in Testimony Disclosure*

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Pursuant to clause 2(g)(5) of House Rule XI, in the case of a witness appearing in a nongovernmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include: (1) a curriculum vitae; and (2) a disclosure of the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous fiscal years by the witness or by an entity represented by the witness. Such statements, with appropriate redaction to protect the privacy of the witness, shall be made publicly available in electronic form not later than one day after the witness appears.

**(1) Name:**

THOMAS L. HENDRICKS

**(2) Other than yourself, name of entity you are representing:**

AIRLINES FOR AMERICA

**(3) Are you testifying on behalf of an entity other than a Government (federal, state, local) entity?**

YES

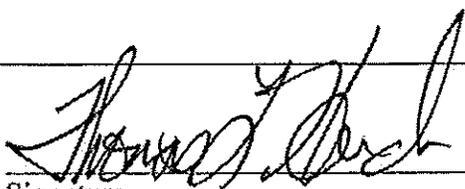
If yes, please provide the information requested below and attach your curriculum vitae.

NO

**(4) Please list the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous fiscal years by you or by the entity you are representing:**

Signature

Date



4/23/12