

SULLY GOES TO WASHINGTON

✘ After Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger and his union crew brought US Airways 1549 to a safe landing and evacuation on the Hudson River last month, I pointed out that most of the key parties involved in the rescue—the pilots, the flight attendants, the ferry crews, the first responders, and the air traffic controllers—had all benefited from years of union activism demanding better safety training.

But Sully, who testifies before the Aviation Subcommittee of the House today, says that the cuts airlines have demanded of pilots in recent years have been chasing the best pilots out of the business, which may lead to a decline in safety in the industry.

It is an incredible testament to the collective character, professionalism and dedication of my colleagues in the industry that they are still able to function at such a high level. It is my personal experience that my decision to remain in the profession I love has come at a great financial cost to me and my family. **My pay has been cut 40%, my pension, like most airline pensions, has been terminated and replaced by a PBGC guarantee worth only pennies on the dollar.**

While airline pilots are by no means alone in our financial struggles – and I want to acknowledge how difficult it is for everyone right now – it is important to underscore that **the terms of our employment have changed dramatically from when I began my career, leading to an untenable financial situation for pilots and their families.** When my company offered pilots who had been laid off the chance to return to work, 60%

refused. Members, I attempt to speak accurately and plainly, so please do not think I exaggerate when I say that I do not know a single professional airline pilot who wants his or her children to follow in their footsteps.

I am worried that the airline piloting profession will not be able to continue to attract the best and the brightest.

The current experience and skills of our country's professional airline pilots come from investments made years ago when we were able to attract the ambitious, talented people who now frequently seek lucrative professional careers. **That past investment was an indispensable element in our commercial aviation infrastructure, vital to safe air travel and our country's economy and security. If we do not sufficiently value the airline piloting profession and future pilots are less experienced and less skilled, it logically follows that we will see negative consequences to the flying public – and to our country.**

We face remarkable challenges in our industry. In order to ensure economic security and an uncompromising approach to passenger safety, **management must work with labor to bargain in good faith.** We must find collective solutions that address the huge economic issues we face in recruiting and retaining the experienced and highly skilled professionals that the industry requires and that passenger safety demands. But further, we must develop and sustain an environment in every airline and aviation organization – a culture that balances the competing needs of accountability and learning. We must create and maintain the trust that is the absolutely essential element of a successful and sustainable safety

reporting system to detect and correct deficiencies before they lead to an accident. **We must not let the economic and financial pressures detract from a focus on constantly improving our safety measures and engaging in ongoing and comprehensive training. In aviation, the bottom line is that the single most important piece of safety equipment is an experienced, well-trained pilot.**

The hero of the "Miracle on the Hudson" just told Congress that unless our country starts valuing the experience and commitment of labor, it will lead to less safe conditions and economic consequences.

You think maybe Congress will listen to Sully?