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Dear Editor:

USA TODAY's editorial on airline safety, "Our view on air safety: Too often, FAA puts industry concerns above passengers," (June 15, 2009) was wrong on several key points.

First, federal regulations are not a "promise," and they are exactly the same for all air carriers. There is, in fact, one level of safety. Moreover, every carrier meets and often exceeds these high standards.

On hiring, USA TODAY has repeatedly conveyed a misperception that pilots are flying after having failed "check rides." This is absolutely not true. No pilot is permitted to fly after failing a check ride, until he or she is retrained, retakes the test, and demonstrates 100 percent proficiency on every maneuver. USA TODAY has a responsibility to correct this.

On qualifications, pilots with less experience are not, "inexperienced." A new hire at a regional airline averages 1,305 hours. First Officers have 3,075 hours and Captains have 8,571. Regional airlines have professional flight crews across the board.

On salary, USA TODAY implies a link between compensation and safety. There is no evidence to support this. In fact, every pilot is trained to a high standard and none would compromise his or her own safety not to mention passengers'.

The truth is, flying is safe. This does not mean we can't make it safer. We can. Safety is our top priority and we are committed to improvements in coordination with the FAA, NTSB, pilot unions and other industry stakeholders.

Signed,
Roger Cohen
President
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