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'We Need To Make A Change'

Former FAA Administrator Randy Babbitt discusses pilot training with RAA Communications Director Aaron Karp

Randy Babbitt likes to tell stories. A pilot for Eastern Air Lines for 25 years, a former president of ALPA and a former FAA administrator, Babbitt has personally lived much of the story of aviation in America. Now serving as an advisor to RAA on training and safety, Babbitt is laser focused on changing the arc of a story he fears is going in the wrong direction. He believes pilot training needs to be modernized.

"Aviation has been evolving since 1903, when the Wright brothers made the first flight, and we constantly adapt and adopt new technology," Babbitt tells *Regional Horizons*. This autumn, Babbitt participated in the FAA's Aviation Workforce Symposium in Washington, D.C. and RAA's Annual Convention in Long Beach, California, moderating panels at both events on pilot training.

"I was exposed to a lot of this new technology at both these events," Babbitt says. "I listened to people talking about what the Air Force is doing today. Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson said at the symposium that the Air Force is embracing this new technology. All of that was really an eye opener for me."

Babbitt is steadfast in promoting the highest levels of safety and believes the way credit is given for the hours needed to gain an Airline Transport Pilot (ATP) license—and thus become a first officer for a regional airline—needs to be reevaluated.

"We're not talking about reducing safety. We're actually talking about improving it," Babbitt says. "If someone had 1,500 hours flying around in a small airplane, they may not have been exposed to much in those 1,500 hours. We already credit 500 hours if you went through a 4-year university degree

program, because we realize that kind of training is worth the equivalent of 500 hours of flying around. What I'm suggesting is that if we program 50 hours of line-oriented flight training in a high-fidelity simulator, a prospective airline pilot ought to get credit for that. I'm not suggesting that the 1,500-hour rule should be changed. I'm suggesting that we expand what we give credit for. You currently get 750 hours of credit for having been trained in the military. So, we do respect quality of training. Why shouldn't we incorporate what the Air Force is doing in civilian training?"

Babbitt continues: "The Air Force, by the way, is adopting a lot of new technology and they're streamlining training. The result, according to Secretary Wilson, is they're getting better trained pilots. So, less time in the pipeline and more time in the mission."

"I don't want to just maintain the status quo. I want to improve the overall safety. By giving credit for advanced training, accepting more simulation, we can improve safety and bring more pilots into the pipeline. In this country, we cap the amount of simulator time that can count toward your ATP at 25 hours. ICAO currently accepts 100 hours of simulator time and has a proposal to raise the cap to 200 hours."

Babbitt continues: "All the data points very clearly to we need to make a change. Take a student from Embry Riddle, Northwestern, Purdue, with 300 hours and test them. They perform very well. And then go fly another 1,200 unsupervised hours. Then go back and give them the same test again, and almost without exception, they perform worse. I think it's time that we acknowledge there's a better way."

HIGH TECH

Technology, Babbitt believes, is the key. In this, he is in alignment with Secretary Wilson, who has noted in public remarks that while technology has changed significantly, the flight training syllabus is largely unchanged from 20 years ago.

“Well, we certainly have the technology today to 100% replicate all the facets of flight,” Babbitt says. “That’s a good thing on a number of levels. It’s far safer. You can do maneuvers in a simulator that you would never actually do in an airplane because it’s too risky. We’ve had a long history of training accidents in the United States. You go back to the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, there was only one measure of a pilot—how much flying time do you have. But with new simulation, we can expose you to far more real-life events in training.”

Babbitt emphasizes that flight time will always be a critical component of flight training. “For both skill improvement and overall roundness of training, you absolutely have to have time in the aircraft,” Babbitt says. But this time in the aircraft should be as structured and as relevant as possible and augmented by simulator training.

“There’s a school of thought that says, well, there’s just no substitute for flying. The problem is, flying an airplane doing what? What are you doing? Just flying

around? That doesn’t tell me much,” Babbitt says. “Today we have new technology and we should be embracing that. It was almost universal on both panels I moderated that simulator time needs to count for more. There was a real willingness to embrace the new technology. Let’s train better and safer.”

Those who disparage simulator training are not thinking through to the logical conclusion of their argument, Babbitt says. “Let’s practice what we preach,” he tells Regional Horizons. “You take an airline pilot today who flies for any major airline. Without exception, that pilot, if he bids a new airplane, is going to go through his entire training in a simulator. The Air Force does the same thing. We rely 100% on simulators for transition-type training. You go from flying a Boeing to an Airbus, you do it all on simulators.”

Babbitt, again, does not discount the importance of flight time. But particularly as data showing pilots with highly structured backgrounds have better airline initial training outcomes, he wants others to understand the benefits of modern simulator time. Those who have played a central role in aviation’s story have always looked toward the horizon and embraced new ways of doing things.





Transatlantic Cooperation

European Regions Airline Association (ERA) Director General Montserrat Barriga visited Washington, D.C. this fall for a series of meetings, including spending a morning at RAA's headquarters with RAA President and CEO Faye Malarkey Black and the entire RAA staff. She briefed RAA on ERA's latest initiatives and the two organizations discussed areas of common interest and explored working together on some key issues. Montserrat later answered questions from RAA Communications Director Aaron Karp about the meeting with RAA and other pressing issues.

Aaron: Why was it important for you to meet with the RAA team?

Montserrat: ERA and RAA members face common industry challenges. It is very important for both associations to stay connected to ensure that we support each other in finding common solutions. Areas of cooperation include air safety matters, new technologies including drones and electric aircraft, environmental solutions to emissions and noise, pilot training, recruiting and retention, addressing industry skills shortages of pilots and engineers and encouraging more women in aviation and technical roles, amongst others.

Aaron: Regional airlines in Europe are also starting to struggle with finding enough qualified pilots and maintenance engineers. What can the industry do to encourage more young people to choose careers in aviation?

Montserrat: The industry needs to invest and communicate to the next generation that these professions are open and available to anyone, people of all ages, cultural backgrounds and of course available to women. We need to encourage our female pilots and engineers to promote the professions and further cooperation programs, financing solutions and scholarships need to be developed between governments, universities and airlines.

Aaron: Regional airlines provide critical links to many markets not served, or that are underserved, by major airlines. Should regional airlines therefore have a bigger voice when aviation public policy is being made?

Montserrat: Absolutely. ERA members are key users of European air space and provide connectivity to hub, secondary and regional airports in Europe, promoting economic development within the communities and regions as well as smaller and remote

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areas. Regulators need to ensure that aviation policy allows these communities to increase their economic potential and facilitate the airline operations within these regions.

Aaron: What is the biggest challenge facing regional airlines in Europe? What is the biggest opportunity for regional airlines in Europe?

Montserrat: There are many challenges facing European aviation at this time. Brexit and the uncertainties about its implementation is a top priority, as well as congestion in the air and at main hubs, industry consolidation, EU261 (Europe's passenger rights

legislation)—which needs to be revised and clarified—and obviously the shortage of qualified personnel in terms of pilots and engineers shortages. The most important opportunity for regional airlines in Europe is to further enhance their role in driving growth of connectivity in Europe and to become stronger leader within European aviation by making their voices heard through ERA. Regional airlines have the flexibility and fleet size to tackle new markets and routes and to become leaders in innovation by expanding alliances and strategic agreements, both with their regional airline colleagues and with larger industry airlines.



FAA Reauthorization...Finally

The FAA moves into 2019 with something it has not had in 37 years: a five-year reauthorization. After years of counterproductive short-term extensions, the FAA is now authorized through 2023; the five-year reauthorization is the longest for the agency since 1982. This provides the FAA, airlines and airports with the ability to plan for the future.

While the legislation is not perfect, and implementation will have to be carefully tracked, this certainty should be applauded. RAA has been among the voices urging Congress to stop using the FAA's authority to operate—which no one questions—as a political football.

RAA appreciates the leadership of Rep. Bill Shuster, Rep. Frank LoBiondo, Rep. Peter DeFazio, Rep. Rick Larsen, Sen. John Thune, Sen. Roy Blunt, Sen. Bill Nelson and Sen. Maria Cantwell in pushing the bipartisan, bicameral compromise across the finish line.

The bill is noteworthy for a number of provisions encouraging the development of the future aviation

workforce. While RAA has pushed for more concrete, safety-enhancing alternate training methods for pilots—taking full advantage of modern training technology—than are included in the five-year reauthorization, it is important to note that the legislation fully acknowledges the challenges facing airlines in recruiting and training pilots and maintenance technicians. With uncertainty over the FAA's authority and funding now eliminated, the agency, Congress and aviation industry stakeholders should work together to improve pilot training to ensure the necessary quality and quantity of future aviators. Importantly, the bill does not strip the FAA of its regulatory authority to address pilot training and qualifications to advance aviation safety.

RAA believes the kind of credit prospective pilots are already receiving should be expanded, especially given the success the U.S. Air Force has had with modern training technology.

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The legislation requires the FAA to establish pilot and maintenance technician workforce development programs to provide grants, totaling \$5 million per year for each program, for eligible projects to support the development of the pilot and maintenance workforce. The bill expresses the sense of Congress that it is critical to have a prevalence of programs and career pathway initiatives leading to employment in the aviation sector. The bill requires the U.S. Comptroller General to conduct a study on various factors and best practices influencing the supply of young workers in the aviation industry and submit a report to Congress within a year.

RAA was pleased the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 expressed the sense of Congress on the importance of encouraging and supporting women pursuing careers in aviation. The challenge of hiring enough pilots and technicians will not be met without the entire popu-

lation having access to viable career pathways. The FAA Administrator has been directed to establish the Women in Aviation Advisory Board, which will promote organizations and programs that provide education, training, mentorship, outreach and recruitment of women into the aviation industry.

Finally, RAA is pleased Congress acknowledged the importance of keeping small communities connected to the global aviation system by reauthorizing the Essential Air Service Program (EAS) at a level of at least \$155 million per year and creating a new Regional Air Transportation Pilot Program under the Small Community Air Service Development Program. The new program, which is authorized at \$4.8 million per year, will help rebuild air service to communities that have experienced service declines in recent years.



Unruly Passengers: A Global Problem

Regional Horizons correspondent Sandra Arnoult was onsite at the RAA Convention in Long Beach

It is not hard to miss a story in the media about unruly passengers. IATA has done a comprehensive study of the issue and produced some important facts that probably won't come as a surprise for anyone who flies.

"We know what the problem is, and it is getting worse," IATA Assistant Director-Member and External Relations Tim Colehan said. "Unruly passengers are one of the top concerns of pilots."

Colehan was speaking on a panel at the RAA Annual Convention in Long Beach, California. Of the incidents that occur, 87% are verbal abuse, which can generally be managed by cabin crew trained in de-escalation techniques, according to IATA. Some 12% of unruly passenger incidents result in damage to the aircraft, according to IATA.

The behavior generally falls into three categories: alcohol intoxication; non-compliance with smoking prohibitions; and disagreements between passengers.

"Before 2017, we had the media on our side, but the narrative changed" after the high-profile incident of a passenger being dragged off an aircraft, Colehan noted.

Colehan said there are initiatives airlines can implement to help staff better handle unruly passengers: Better communication of expectations for behavior onboard, more public service messages highlighting the penalties (fines, arrests, cancelled trips, etc.) that could result from unruly passenger behavior and more cooperation with airports, where passengers can drink large amounts of alcohol in bars.