



STUDENT LOANS COULD HELP AVERT U.S. AIRLINE PILOT SHORTAGE: UNION HEAD

News / Airlines



The head of the world's largest pilots union urged the [airline](#) industry on Monday to find ways to alleviate the rising costs of aviators' schooling, saying a shortage of regional airline pilots looms in the United States.

The expensive education required to become a **pilot**, coupled with the low wages and benefits of entry-level jobs, is deterring the next generation of pilots from entering the profession, Tim Canoll, president of the Air Line Pilots Association, International (ALPA), said in an interview.

That could result in service cuts to small U.S. cities and hurt regional carriers where many commercial pilots get their start, such as Republic Airways Holdings Inc and SkyWest Inc, which larger U.S. airlines contract to operate low-demand routes.

Republic said in July that a shortage of pilots and an ongoing labor dispute forced it to fly less than

forecast, causing second-quarter income to fall 79 percent year-over-year. The company's share price has plunged.

Canoll said ALPA, which does not represent pilots at Republic, currently sees no shortage of available candidates for U.S. airlines including Republic. There were roughly two government-approved pilots for every aviator job in the United States in 2014, according to the union, which represents pilot groups at 31 U.S. and Canadian airlines.

But demand for pilots is expected to jump in the next decade as U.S. airlines add planes to their fleets and thousands of pilots retire. Hiring sprees by the likes of American Airlines Group Inc and Delta Air Lines Inc may mean regional carriers are hard-pressed to find new staff.

Canoll said corporate or government-backed loans could help students pay their way through flight school. He said large U.S. airlines could also promise pilots-in-training a job after they do a stint at one of the regional carriers.

Large U.S. airlines will have to pay the regional carriers more so those companies can offer competitive wages, he added. Otherwise, carriers such as American may have to take over the routes that regionals operate.

"We have to find a way to draw the picture for a young person" considering the pilot profession, Canoll said. "They're just not going to do it for US\$22,000 a year," he said, referring to a current typical starting salary at a regional airline.

Informal talks on how to avert a shortage are under way among industry and government stakeholders, and a formal group may be on the horizon, he said.

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