

An Interview with FAA

In late May, ALPA's president, Capt. John Prater, praised the U.S. Senate's confirmation of Capt. J. Randolph Babbitt as the next administrator of the FAA, saying: "Airline pilots across the country welcome the confirmation of Capt. Babbitt as the next administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration. Babbitt's experience as an airline pilot, a union president, an aviation consultant, and a member of numerous government and industry advisory committees will serve him well as he leads our industry."

"On behalf of every member of the Air Line Pilots Association, Int'l we stand ready to work with the new administrator to take on pilot fatigue and the other challenges that must be addressed as our industry continues to pursue the highest possible standard of safety."

In mid-August, ALPA sat down with Administrator Babbitt at FAA headquarters in Washington, D.C., to get his input on issues important to ALPA and its members. By ALPA Staff

Q *Air Line Pilot:* As administrator, you hit the ground running with high-profile events and the FAA/DOT's "Call to Action" on regional airline safety. What can you tell us about this initiative?

A *Administrator Babbitt:* As ALPA's president in the mid-1990s, I led efforts to help the FAA develop the "One Level of Safety" regulations that require regional air carriers to operate under the same rules as their major airline counterparts. While we're in a very safe period in aviation history, the Colgan Air accident reminds us that we can't rest on our laurels. One mistake is too many. Now is the time for the FAA, unions, and airlines to work together to strengthen safety at regional airlines.

On June 24, DOT Secretary Ray LaHood and I called on the industry to reduce risk at regional airlines and to promote major airlines' best practices. The response has been positive, and we plan to push safety initiatives forward. We're holding a series of 12 regional airline safety forums across the nation through the end of August. The discussions focus on air carrier management responsibilities for crew education and support, professional standards and flight discipline, training standards and performance, and mentoring. The FAA will collect effective airline best practic-

es and innovative ideas and share that information with airlines and unions. FAA inspectors will then assess how airlines are using the information.

I expect airlines that have contractual relationships with regional feeders to develop specific programs to share safety data and ensure that their partner airlines mirror their most effective safety practices. We're also upgrading training standards for pilots, flight attendants, and dispatchers, and I expect industry support so that we can deliver a final rule promptly.

Q What is your opinion of proactive data-gathering safety programs, such as FOQA and ASAP? Where do you want to take these programs as a next step?

A They're invaluable. We get a vast amount of information through these and other voluntary reporting programs, some of which we really couldn't get any other way.

FOQA and ASAP data have led to safety enhancements in areas like deicing programs, airport signage, air traffic procedures, and maintenance. For example, there have been situations in which air carrier employees reported they had identified and corrected improperly installed equipment. Because they shared the data, we were able to

improve and clarify information provided to mechanics so similar mistakes wouldn't happen at other carriers.

We've also expanded these programs into the air traffic arena with a non-punitive reporting system for controllers called the Air Traffic Safety Action Program, or ATSAP. This agreement with NATCA lets controllers and other FAA employees openly report safety concerns without fear of punishment unless the incident is criminal or deliberate in nature. About one-third of the country is now covered by ATSAP.

Programs like these are vital to shifting our safety philosophy away from a "fix-and-fly" response to accidents toward a proactive approach. The key to that approach is our Aviation Safety Information Analysis and Sharing program, ASIAs for short. Using ASIAs, we can monitor and assess the terabytes of data streaming through the U.S. aviation system every day. We can then use that information to develop and implement *preventive* safety measures spanning multiple airlines and fleets.

The data come from sources within the FAA, and, just as important, include FOQA and ASAP data from 16 U.S. major, regional, and cargo air carriers.

Our future plans for ASIAs will target air carriers' safety reporting programs in maintenance, dispatch, and flight attendant filings. We also plan to fold in data from the Air Transportation Oversight System (ATOS) covering all 117 U.S. air carriers, providing a new blend of data that will yield an additional look at nationwide safety trends.

Q If there was one issue you could resolve tomorrow at the FAA, what would it be?

A My goal is to run the National Airspace System safely and look to the future through NextGen and commercial space investment. Labor stability and confidence are crucial as we implement NextGen. I'm optimis-

Administrator Babbitt



tic we'll reach an agreement with the air traffic controllers on most of the contract issues. The best agreements are reached when everyone *wants* an agreement, and right now there is both that desire and a positive atmosphere. We both agreed to a process that has never been attempted in the federal government before, and it looks like that process will result in an agreement on most issues. [The FAA and NATCA reached a tentative labor agreement on August 13.]

We also need to make sure we have accountability and credibility across the board. I want to see all 45,000 FAA employees move with confidence in their skills and pride in their work. I don't see that now. We've got to get that restored. NextGen will find success only through collaboration.

Q You recently tasked an Aviation Rulemaking Committee with the job of reviewing the antiquated flight-time/duty-time regulations. What are your goals for addressing this hot-button issue? How will you approach the balance of pilot staffing versus adequate rest?

A As a former airline pilot, I know firsthand that fatigue is a very real safety issue. I've made pilot fatigue a high priority, and we're working quickly to develop and implement new flight-time, duty-time, and rest rules based on fatigue science and a review of international approaches to the issue. I've charged an Aviation Rulemaking Committee (ARC)—that includes FAA, labor, and industry representatives—to develop recommendations for an FAA rule by September 1.

Airplanes operate globally in 24 time zones. Domestic short-leg, multi-leg, and nonstop ultra-long-haul flights all present challenges. It's time that the FAA's rules reflect the reality of today's operating environment. I expect airlines to use a risk-management ap-

PHOTOS: WILLIAM A. FORD



“I would like to take aviation to the next level of safety, embracing technology and then being able to look back and know that the FAA has become the model for other countries and agencies for efficiency, safety, and being a great place to work.”—*FAA Administrator Babbitt*



proach to mitigate fatigue based on the airline’s route structure and pilot needs. We need to incorporate the latest research and fatigue-mitigation strategies into our rules so that our nation’s professional pilots can keep flying safely.

Q In our changing aviation system, how do you view proscriptive regulations? Are they in our future, do they have a role in an SMS environment?

A Having a Safety Management System isn’t a substitute for compliance with FAA regulations, operating rules, and policies. They must continue to be the foundation of safety.

But a strong, well-developed SMS gives us a more systematic way to develop, implement, and meet those standards. It gives operators a clear set of requirements through which they have to demonstrate their safety management capabilities. Implementing an SMS creates a positive culture of prevention that promotes safety in all activities. It reduces risk by controlling the processes to identify and prevent problems before they start—the approach we’re stressing at the FAA. Our Flight Standards Service is already engaged in a series of pilot projects that are exploring all aspects of SMS implementation.

So, while I strongly believe a positive, proactive relationship with the aviation community is better for safety than an adversarial, legalistic stance, we certainly will not abrogate our responsibilities as the nation’s aviation regulator.

Q How do you see the FAA shaping the world of aviation, as we enter the Next Generation era?

A First of all, we’re not doing it alone. We’re moving toward NextGen in collaboration with all of our industry partners, including the airlines, manufacturers, state and local governments, consortiums, and academia. We all need to work together on this, and the collaboration is evident in the many agreements already in place that are allowing us to roll out NextGen technologies.

We all agree, too, on the need to transform a system that in some regards dates back to World War II. NextGen will let us fly people around the country with greater safety and efficiency and with less impact on the environment.

We’re seeing some of those benefits today. The fatal accident rate for pilots using satellite-based avionics in Alaska has been cut in half. Passengers throughout the country are flying more direct routes from Point A to Point B. We’re saving time and money and burning less fuel in the process.

The thing about NextGen is that it won’t be turned on by a switch. We expect to have everything in place by 2020, but we’re rolling it out now.

Q What does your background not only as a 30-year career airline pilot, but also as president of the Air Line Pilots Association, Int’l for 8 years bring to your new role as FAA administrator? How do you see your role in helping the airline industry work with the FAA to accomplish what needs to be done?

A I think my background in aviation, starting from the grass roots as a pilot, really helps. I’ve been for-

tunate to enjoy a career that spanned many aspects of aviation that now help me moving forward.

Q To what extent do you communicate with your Canadian counterpart, Transport Canada’s Director General of Civil Aviation Martin Eley?

A We are off to a great start, and I expect to continue open and frequent dialogue.

Q What do you think would most surprise your fellow airline pilots about being “inside” the FAA, instead of “outside”? What would you like to tell them, based on your new perspective from the 10th floor of 800 Independence Avenue?

A The spirit of the folks here—they are a great and highly motivated team that get way too little recognition for their work.

Q At ALPA, you left quite the legacy, spearheading the “One Level of Safety” campaign that resulted from the series of aviation accidents in the early 1990s. In fact, you often refer to it in your new role. What sort of legacy do you plan on creating at the FAA?

A I would like to take aviation to the next level of safety, embracing technology and then being able to look back and know that the FAA has become the model for other countries and agencies for efficiency, safety, and being a great place to work.

Q What would you consider your other top priorities?

A We always have safety at the top, but my other priorities are implementing NextGen and realizing the enormous benefits, both in time savings and to the environment with fuel burn and noise reductions. And having our workforce working as a team where dignity and respect are not slogans but the way we work with each other. 🌐