

Chairman Steve Knight (R-CA)
Subcommittee on Contracting and Workforce
“Troubled Skies: The Aviation Workforce Shortage’s Impact on Small Businesses”
September 26, 2018

I’d like to begin by thanking the witnesses for taking the time to come and speak to us on this issue today.

Aviation gets into your blood. As children, we are told that the sky is the limit. The Wright Brothers pushed that limit in 1903 when they flew over Kitty Hawk for the first time. There are families steeped in aviation that have developed a passionate network of small businesses vital to the continuing existence of worldwide commerce and geopolitics as we know it. Fixed Base Operators, Overhaul Stations, maintenance operations, and other firms in aviation are dominated by what many would consider to be “mom and pop” operations.

But, as baby boomers begin to retire, the economy has begun to feel the strains of their departure. These highly experienced and highly skilled employees are leaving the industry at an exponentially faster rate than new labor is being brought in.

Studies and anecdotal evidence show that we are only just beginning to experience the first effects of this shortage. Reports currently project that by 2027, there will be a 9% fault between supply and demand for aviation mechanics and a need to hire hundreds of thousands of new pilots in the next two decades. With airlines growing and their need for pilots and mechanics ever increasing, small businesses are particularly vulnerable to losing their workforce at a faster rate than their competitors.

Case in point; this Committee invited the owner of a small charter company in my district to testify today, however this small business owner had to cancel his trip at the last minute. Why? Because he was unable to staff enough pilots today and had to fly customers himself, or risk taking a significant financial loss. This Committee has unfortunately lost the opportunity to hear his story, as a direct result of this pilot shortage.

In sum, we know far too little about how these shortages are impacting the small businesses that support the aviation industry. Small businesses have particularized concerns and additional complexities that need to be shared and explored. The point of this hearing is not only to hear the stories of those who have boots on the ground, but to also inform those who are entering the workforce that aviation is a viable option for their future. Our economy needs pilots and mechanics and our witnesses are here to tell you that they are hiring people like you, right now. We look forward to your testimony.

I now yield to the Ranking Member, Ms. Murphy, for her opening statement.

