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Pilot Shortage Hits Airlines Due to New Rules and Retirements

Tuesday, 04 Feb 2014 07:28 AM

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A confluence of factors is causing a predicted pilot shortage to hit the airlines sooner than expected, **The Wall Street Journal reported.**

"Communities large and small will lose air service due to the shortage of pilots," said Roger Cohen, president of the Regional Airline Association.

Regional carrier Great Lakes Aviation, for instance, is suspending flights to cities in North Dakota and Iowa. United Continental plans to cut 60 percent of its Cleveland flights by summertime, basically doing away with that unprofitable mini-hub.

The pilot shortage hit because thousands of senior aviators brought on in the 1980s are reaching the mandatory retirement age of 65.

Also, in 2010 Congress mandated new rules, now being enforced by the FAA, that require trainee pilots to log 1,500 flight hours (compared to the previous 250).

Moreover, the FAA is also requiring more down time for pilots to avoid fatigue, meaning about 5 percent more pilots are needed to maintain airline schedules.

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To meet the challenge, the major airlines are recalling furloughed pilots and ramping up hiring. Many of their recruits are coming from smaller regional carriers. These have a harder time hiring because of low starting salaries— \$16,000 to \$25,000— for pilots who have spent \$75,000 to \$150,000 on their training.

The shortage is not going away.

At American airlines the average pilot is 53 years old, meaning that hiring will be an issue for years to come. A limited pool will also mean that some regional airlines will find it expedient to hire pilots they might have previously disqualified, the Journal reported.

The major carriers may decide to create their own company-sponsored academies to train aviators.

Separately, the U.S. Air Force anticipates that it will have 400 fewer fighter pilots than it needs within three years, according to the Journal.

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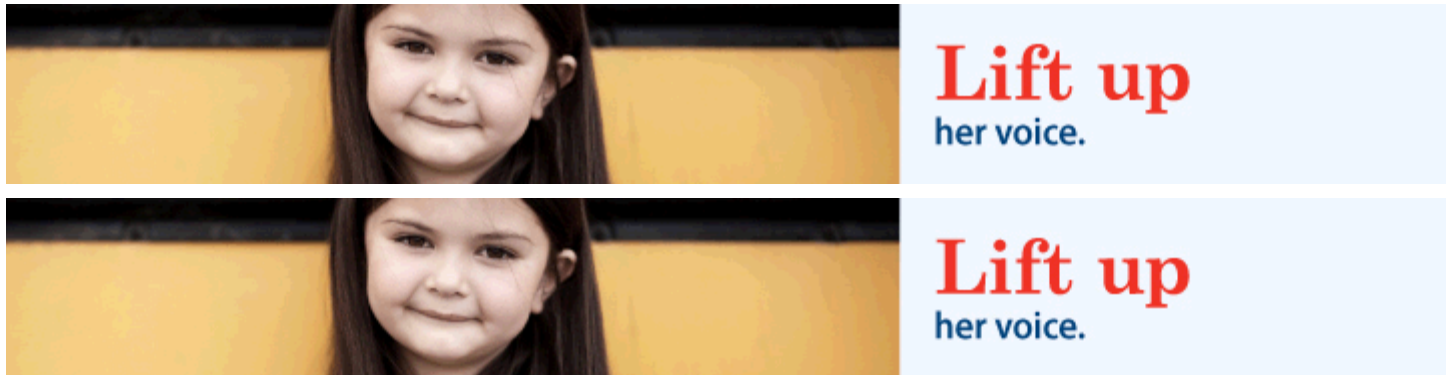
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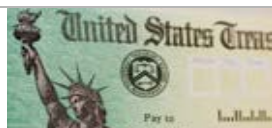

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Changes at Eastern Iowa Airport could lead to smoother security checks

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Passengers walk through a security checkpoint Thursday, Feb. 28, 2013, at The Eastern Iowa Airport in Cedar Rapids. (Kaitlyn Bernauer/The Gazette)

An expedited security screening process is coming to The Eastern Iowa Airport and should mean shorter lines and less waiting at security checkpoints.

After an online screening, travelers can register for the program called the Transportation Security Administration PreCheck at a new Cedar Rapids enrollment center, which opened about two weeks ago at 625 1st Ave. SW.

PreCheck-approved travelers can use designated security lanes that don't require steps such as

removing shoes, belts and light jackets, extracting laptops from cases or taking liquids out of carry-on luggage.

The lanes are available to those that qualify at 115 airports, including Des Moines International Airport, on a flight-by-flight basis.

"I love it," said Scott Firmstone, who flew 100 segments and about 65,000 miles last year for his job in telecommunication sales. "You don't have to take off your belt, your shoes, get your laptop out of the bag, take out your liquids. It really saves a lot of time, and it's just less of a hassle."

At this point, The Eastern Iowa Airport has a subset of the benefits, primarily allowing PreCheck-approved passengers to wear shoes through the security gates. That began on Tuesday, an airport spokeswoman said.

"It went well yesterday, but as far as trends I can't say yet how well it is working," said Heather Wilson, director of marketing and communication for the airport.

The rest of the features of PreCheck are expected to come to Cedar Rapids and will be available when TSA installs additional screening equipment, she said. Wilson nor a TSA spokeswoman could say when the expanded PreCheck would begin.

Those that want to participate in PreCheck can apply through a pre-enrollment process at the TSA.gov website. The registration process is completed in person at an enrollment center where applicants must provide fingerprints, biographical information, identification documents and payment.

It cost \$85 for a five-year membership.

Alaska Airlines, American Airlines, Delta Airlines, Hawaiian Airlines, JetBlue, Southwest Airlines, United Airlines, US Airways and Virgin America currently participate in PreCheck.

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TSA PreCheck-approved travelers will still be subject to random security measures.



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