

# The Success of the Aviation Worker Jobs Program

FACES OF THE CARES ACT PAYROLL SUPPORT PROGRAM



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### Introduction

In March, as U.S. COVID-19 cases began rising exponentially, it became clear that our country was facing not only a public health crisis, but an economic one. Congress rose to the occasion by enacting the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act, Pub. L. No. 116-136), which provided assistance to tens of millions of working Americans.

Included in the CARES Act was the new and extremely successful Payroll Support Program (PSP), which allocated grants to commercial airlines and airline contractors for the exclusive purpose of keeping employees on payroll with wages and benefits through September 30, 2020. These grants—essentially payments to workers, passed through their employers—have kept nearly 1 million airline industry workers on the payroll and off unemployment, including mechanics, baggage handlers, gate agents, catering workers, flight attendants, pilots, and others. Now, for the first time, some of the workers who have benefited from this program have come forward to share—in their own words—what PSP means to them and their families.

While PSP has been a success, workers' livelihoods, and the integrity of our nation's aviation industry, remains in peril. When Congress passed the CARES Act, there was hope for a significant recovery in U.S. aviation by the fall of 2020. This is no longer the case. With the current resurgence of COVID-19 across the country and a vaccine yet to be developed, passenger demand for air travel will not recover before the PSP expires on September 30. Without an extension of the PSP, hundreds of thousands of workers may lose their jobs and health insurance, and the aviation industry will lose a large portion of the experienced and credentialed workforce that will be critical to bringing the sector, and the broader economy, back to prosperity once the COVID-19 crisis is over.

Only through an extension of PSP grants can Congress ensure that airline workers will continue to stay on payroll and ready to turn the industry around, prevent mass unemployment in October, and keep aviation workers ready to lift off as travel picks back up. To learn more about how PSP has positively impacted the lives of frontline aviation workers, and why Congress must extend this critical jobs program, read the case studies below.

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## Case Studies

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**Name:** Susannah Carr

**Position:** Flight Attendant

**Airline:** United Airlines

**Union:** Association of Flight Attendants-CWA

**Years of Service:** 5

**Location/Airport Where Based:** Newark, NJ (EWR)

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My name is Susannah Carr. I am a Flight Attendant with United Airlines, based at Newark Liberty International Airport. COVID-19 remains an unprecedented threat to aviation. Hundreds of flight attendants have tested positive for the virus and many have lost their lives. Four months in, commercial volume is still down by more than 85 percent from last year.

When the pandemic hit, my fellow flight attendants and I were immediately concerned for our safety and the safety of our passengers. But we also worried about our jobs and paychecks. Air travel quickly ground to a halt. Airports looked like ghost towns. It was clear aviation would collapse without intervention, and along with it all of our jobs.



While I am currently available to work a full schedule, the flying isn't there. In the month of April, I had four trips scheduled, all of which were cancelled, and no reassignment was given. During the month of May I was on Reserve and was given one airport assignment. During the airport standby I was called to the gate to work pre boarding, but I ultimately did not work the flight. For the month of June I was on Reserve again and released with pay each day. There are no trips to pick up. Normally you would have several trips a day become available to add hours to your schedule. Most of us worked many more hours than our minimum guarantees to make ends meet, but that is impossible now. I know that without Congressional intervention, I would have been furloughed for several months already and reliant on unemployment if I could get it. I know so many who have struggled to even get their unemployment checks.

That's why I am so grateful to the members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and the leadership of my union. Thanks to their hard work and foresight that day has yet to come. Congress passed the Payroll Support Program (PSP) in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act in March to keep the dedicated, highly-trained and

credentialed workforce of the aviation industry paid, connected to our healthcare, and out of the unemployment lines.

Funding for the PSP goes exclusively toward maintaining the salaries, wages, and benefits of my fellow aviation workers and me, a provision that prevented the kinds of mass unemployment we've seen in other industries. Instead, this historic, workers first relief package has saved our jobs and kept us connected to our benefits. It has kept our industry intact - and that means the millions of people who make up aviation.

I want to be clear: the PSP is working. Though my hours are down given the decline in demand for air travel, I'm still getting paid and so are my fellow flight attendants. This means we can still pay our rents and mortgages, we can still put food on the table for our families, and we can still cover other necessary expenses, like copays for prescription drugs. We're also still covered by our employer-sponsored health insurance--a pretty big relief since the idea of losing my health insurance in the middle of a global pandemic is terrifying. And, because we're still getting paid, we're still paying taxes and contributing to our local economies as consumers. The PSP has saved the jobs of hundreds of thousands of aviation workers, including mine. It has given me financial security and emotional security. This is a historic workers first relief package but we have to make sure that a lapse in this critical protection does not undo the good work that was started.

The program is set to expire on September 30th and the time to prepare for October 1 is now. When CARES was written it was expected the industry would be closer to full recovery by the fall. It is clear now, that will not happen. At a minimum, Congress should extend the program for another 6 months, through the end of March. An extension will ensure that we do not see a wave of layoffs in the aviation industry flood unemployment offices in October. While airlines have had time to stabilize the operation with reduced capacity, it is now my job and nearly 500,000 other aviation jobs that are on the line October 1, 2020 without an extension of the program. The program is already in place. It just needs to be extended.

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**Name:** Ruth V Peniston  
**Position:** Customer Service Agent - Part Time  
**Airline:** American Airlines  
**Union:** CWA Local 3641  
**Years of Service:** 33  
**Location/Airport Where Based:** Charlotte, NC (CLT)

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My name is Ruth and I have been an employee of American airlines for 33 years. My duties and responsibilities as a front line employee put me face to face with the flying public as well as team members on a non-stop basis.



In March, as the COVID-19 crisis began to unfold, our station, American Airlines' second-busiest hub, saw a dramatic change. In the span of only a few days, it went from a site bustling with people and filled wall-to-wall to a virtual ghost town. First the passengers stopped flying, then the shops and restaurants one by one closed down.

In trying to address the onslaught of calls, several stations including CLT quickly put together a mini reservation group that worked in one of our training rooms. Several of my team members contracted the virus, as so little was known about the infection pathways at that time.

Amidst this unrest, my hours as a part-time employee were reduced to 12 hours per week, the contract minimum. Based on my rate of pay, I qualified for an unemployment benefit of \$36/week in North Carolina. That gave me a grand total of \$420 per week of earnings, of which deductions for medical and dental insurance, taxes, etc. had to be made. I was forced to reduce my 401K contribution to the company's matching level.

I am surviving due to the \$600 per week from the CARES Act Payroll Support Program. I've been able to manage my mortgage with payments on the first and third weeks, along with two small insurance bills. On the second and fourth weeks, I am managing my HOA dues, utilities, groceries and gas, home warranty and credit cards bills. Because of the PSP, I did not have to put those payments on hold.

It has not been determined how much longer I will have a 12 hr work week, but because of the PSP I am managing at this time. I am aware that the additional funding is coming to an end. I am not sure how I will manage my finances if the PSP is not extended. This is the

life I have known and committed to for over three decades. I cannot imagine an existence without it.

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**Name:** Chris Avila

**Position:** Ramp Worker

**Airline:** Southwest Airlines

**Union:** Transport Workers Union

**Years of Service:** 22

**Location/Airport Where Based:** Ontario, CA (ONT)

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My position as a Ramp Agent at Southwest airlines entails such tasks as loading and unloading luggage, freight and other committees. I ensure an accurate count and weight of all items loaded onto the aircraft to ensure compliance with FAA regulations and also provide a layer of defense on the grounds, watching for suspicious behavior or possible intruders. This has been my purpose and my way of providing for my family for the last 22 years.



Since the spread of COVID-19, changes in the state of California and in my local area have caused a lot of uncertainty in our industry. It is on par to those of the aftermath of 9/11/2001. Many rumors of layoffs coming right before the holidays and this, coupled with the fear of workplace exposure and infection, created anxiety and unease. I am worried about my family. I am worried that I might unwittingly bring this virus home to them, and I am worried that I will lose my job and be unable to financially support them. It is bad enough that my wife, a preschool teacher, is uncertain about the future of her school opening this fall, or even this year.

My wife's school has been closed since March of this year. Without PSP, we would not have been able to contribute to our household finances. We would not have been able to survive financially without the loan her school received to keep paying the staff. With the decline of the travel industry, there has been no overtime that I could have worked to make up the difference. If either of us lost our careers due to this pandemic, we have no clue what we would do to provide for our children. If I were to lose my job due to layoffs, our family and my school-age children would also lose our healthcare.

With the uncertainty surrounding the COVID19 pandemic I do not see how many of those in my industry, not to mention people of all livelihoods, can survive this year without an



extension of the PSP. We need the protection and peace of mind that the PSP has provided thus far, and hopefully at least for the rest of 2020.

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**Name:** Debby Tucker

**Position:** Flight Attendant

**Airline/Company:** ExpressJet/United Express

**Union:** IAM

**Years of Service:** 15

**Location/Airport Where Based:** Houston, TX (IAH)

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Whether it's handling irate passengers because of weather delays, medical emergencies or the many other issues that arise on a day to day basis, the job of a flight attendant can be stressful under normal circumstances. But, with COVID-19 it's been much worse.

The constant anxiety of not knowing if you're potentially exposing yourself to a deadly virus is palpable among the employees and passengers. Monitoring passengers to make sure they are wearing masks and practicing safety guidelines is yet another duty we have taken on. However, I am so grateful to continue to have a job and provide for my family. Without PSP I would have been furloughed and left without a paycheck and without healthcare.



As a single mom, my job is how I provide for myself and my son. Without my income and secure paycheck and healthcare I don't know where we would be right now.

Because of PSP, I can still support my son and myself. He's graduating high school this year, and as difficult a time this is to be graduating during a pandemic, I'm grateful that I am not dealing with being unemployed at the same time we should be celebrating his accomplishments.

I am blessed to work in an industry that I love, and in a career where I can bring people together safely every day. Airlines provide hundreds of thousands of middle-class jobs and contribute to a thriving economy. I know that if we can attain a PSP extension, not only will it allow airline workers to thrive and keep contributing to the economy, but ultimately it will also allow airlines to bounce back as quickly as possible.

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**Name:** Carlos Ayala  
**Position:** Ramp Service Employee  
**Airline:** United Airlines  
**Union:** IAMAW Union  
**Years of Service:** 13  
**Location/Airport Where Based:** Houston, TX (IAH)

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My job is to help passengers get where they are going safely while transporting mail, cargo, or much needed essential items such as masks, gloves, etc, to combat Covid-19. As a Ramp/Fleet Service Employee, I am responsible for receiving and dispatching passenger aircrafts every day.

Today, we have substantially less flights than we did before March of 2020. Once I started seeing aircrafts grounded, and airport terminals depressingly empty, I thought I would lose my paycheck. The writing was all over the wall. That is, until the Payroll Support Program of the CARES Act provided for the continuation of payment of my wages and benefits.



This assured that me and my family could pay for the roof over our heads, keep up with the bills, and very importantly, continue to pay for our medical insurance as that had become even more crucial during a pandemic. The thought alone of not being able to receive my paycheck turned our stomachs. And adding to that, the thought of becoming ill without medical coverage was sickening to say the least. PSP has been a blessing for me and my family.

We hope and continue to pray that this pandemic ends sooner than later and that the PSP protection is extended so we may continue to move forward. It would be devastating for me and my family if PSP is not extended. I am committed to work even harder to take care of my job/passengers, the flying public, and my co-workers, as well as my community, and my country.



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**Name:** Andrea' Myers  
**Position:** Remote Reservation Agent  
**Airline:** United Airlines  
**Union:** IAMAW  
**Years of Service:** 21  
**Location/Airport Where Based:** Detroit, MI (DTW)

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My name is Andrea' and my job title is Remote Reservations Sales and Service Representative - Lead. I have been researching problems, providing tech support and customer problem resolution for 21 years. I am also a Union Representative that assists members with company and personal related issues that may arise.

It is my belief that without the PSP I would have been laid off, and lost my home and medical coverage. A number of my friends at DL have been laid off or have suffered extreme loss of hours. The airports for a while were like ghost towns, just no one there.



I suffered from COVID-19. It was a tremendous burden on my family and myself. I also had an underlying medical issue that made the infection more deadly. The PSP has allowed me to keep food on the table, light and gas in my house, and a roof over my head. It also supported medical expenses that I encountered during this difficult time. But more importantly, it stopped any layoffs my company wanted to do. The PSP allowed me to undergo a serious surgery for a major illness. I am sure that without the PSP, I would have been in far worse shape today and unable to write this letter.

The extension of the PSP could literally mean the difference between life and death for some people. COVID-19 doesn't care about politics or open or closed states. If people lose their jobs and medical coverage, it could cost lives.

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**Name:** Nicholas Cordaro

**Position:** First Officer B777, B737

**Airline:** United Airlines

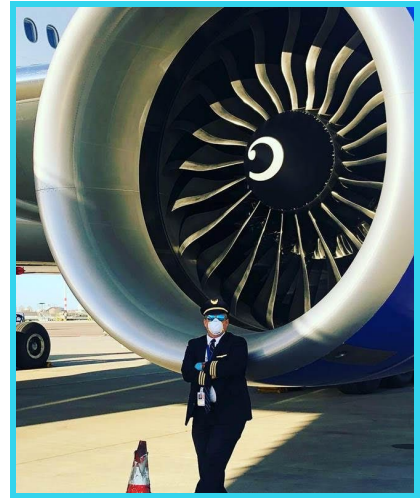
**Union:** ALPA

**Years of Service:** 3

**Location/Airport Where Based:** Newark, NJ (EWR)

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Currently I am a displaced first officer on the B777 at United Airlines. I am now displaced back to the B737 out of EWR. As of June 1, 2020 I have been on paid company leave of absence until October 1, 2020. While on the B777 from January until May of 2020, I was the First Officer assisting the captain on most European, Asian and some domestic flights. On the overseas flights I was also the international relief officer at times. At this time I am home with my family because I wanted to take advantage of the 60 hour a month paid leave of absence for several reasons: First, I am strongly convinced I will be furloughed come October 1, 2020 unless a CARES ACT II is implemented. Second, since furlough is inevitable at this time I am looking for alternate means of employment in the aviation industry. I am mostly looking in the cargo/charter department at this time. Employment and healthcare is very pertinent because of my family which consists of my wife and our two small children. Both of our children are special needs who were diagnosed with autism. They rely not only on my financial stability but my healthcare stability as well. Third, being on leave of absence would be a good deterrent from getting infected with COVID-19, since the B777 does most of its flying in hotspots over Europe and Asia.



I am currently networking a diligent amount to find a means of employment in the cargo/charter department in the aviation industry. I've been at this since May of 2020 and it has been anything but successful. There is a lot of competition out there as the growing fear of job security in part 121 outfit has become a great concern. As of today my confidence in finding another job in the industry is not nearly as high as it was in May of 2020. It would be a tremendous relief if our industry can get a six month extension into March of 2021 with the CARES act. At least I'll be able to provide shelter and health care to my extended family throughout the whole year and into 2021. Not to mention the holiday season will be less stressful due to employment being guaranteed throughout the whole time. Please take this into great consideration. I can't speak for all pilots at United Airlines however I can attest how the majority feels at this time. The majority of us desire strong relief during this unfortunate time of a global pandemic.