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Pilot Shortage Hits Airlines Due to New Rules and Retirements

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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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