

The Elephant in The Crewroom

Many of you by now know that our union—



the Air Line Pilots Association, International—is under attack by a group of pilots who want to decertify ALPA at US Airways to get out from under an arbitrated seniority list.

This arbitrated list was the direct result of decisions made by leaders of the America West and US Airways pilot groups as they followed the provisions of our Merger Policy. Using outside merger counsel, they failed to negotiate a single seniority list and chose to turn their fate over to an arbitrator.

The Merger Committees chose George Nicolau as the neutral arbitrator. On May 3, he presented the seniority list along with his rationale for it. At that moment, many pilots learned—or relearned—a hard lesson: Controlling your own landing is always better than turning your fate over to an outsider.

There is so much more to this story. US Airways pilots from the “east” went through multiple mergers, endured two terrible bankruptcies, lost their defined-benefit pensions, and saw half of their members furloughed. It was so bad that captains with 16 to 20 years of longevity lost the left seat.

“West” pilots experienced their own bankruptcy and a

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contract negotiated under the constraints of an Air Transportation Stabilization Board loan guarantee. They never had a defined-benefit retirement plan to lose. They agreed to bypass their right to open under Section 6 to concentrate on negotiating a single joint contract.

Before the award, both groups were doing a tremendous job building unity and solidarity. Five months later, they still fly and suffer under bankruptcy-era terms.

My fellow National Officers, the Executive Council, and I have heard from thousands of pilots from both groups. Some demand that we do things that we do not have the authority to do. Others plead with us to learn from this and to not let it happen to others. The Executive Council and I

listened to all of the issues and provided support and guidance to the pilots while we followed ALPA's Constitution and Policies to rule on the MEC requests.

My message now to all ALPA members is that we cannot permit one issue—even one that has caused such unhappiness—to destroy contract negotiations and our union's representation rights. We can provide a path and process for these groups to follow. And we can provide the stability in future airline mergers to ensure that we fight management, not each other. This combined pilot group deserves both the economic improvements *and* career advancement that the new bargaining cycle and a healthy, expanding company can support.

But will US Airways pilots achieve that? I remain optimistic. (See “Turning the Tables,” page 34.) If we follow ALPA policy, we can. Fully participating in problem-solving approaches while bargaining to end the bankruptcy nightmare with new rates, benefits, and work rules is the one path that will provide success.

In late October, we called the MECs to bring their Joint Negotiating Committee to Washington for intense discussions to develop a comprehensive counterproposal for negotiations of a single contract, including issues related to implementation of the Nicolau Award.

US Airways pilots who are intent on rejecting the arbitrator's final and binding seniority list *cannot* succeed. A new organization, founded on the goal of reordering the list, will face endless litigation over the Nicolau Award with little chance of success.

The new group will see a large chunk of the pilot group cancelling dues checkoff and suing their union, long periods during which nothing happens, and years of providing management cheap labor while the new organization tries to organize itself, build resources, and negotiate. And if any seniority list becomes a subject for negotiations, there will be efforts to negotiate it again and again every time leadership changes.

I ask every ALPA pilot to reach out to our brothers and sisters from both groups and offer to stand with them as they fight to save their careers, fight for a new contract, and fight for their union.

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A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Prater". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.