

Rewards for Smooth Landings

I recently had the opportunity to carry our union's



message directly to several audiences with great influence over the economic health of our industry. These included gatherings in New York City of airline analysts and investors, in Phoenix of labor executives of many of the airlines whose pilots ALPA represents, and in Washington, D.C., of congressional leaders and key industry reporters.

The first thing I can tell you is that ALPA's status as the leader and advocate for airline pilots is unchallenged. Despite five years of hell and billions in concessions, everyone knows that ALPA remains a force to be reckoned with as our industry recovers.

I want to share the heart of the message I delivered to the powerful people who affect our careers:

U.S. airline pilots have endured much and sacrificed deeply for more than five years to save our airlines and industry. We made those concessions based on worst-possible-case scenarios and with bankruptcy court judges promising to make decisions about our airlines, jobs, and right to withdraw our services if we did not move quickly.

But airlines recovered much more quickly than the scenarios painted by managements in bankruptcy courts and at the bargaining table, meaning that concessionary provi-

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sions don't need to last until amendable dates. Executives are making it clear that their airlines have turned the corner. They have already taken huge bonuses, raises, and stock options for their performance. Pilots did more than their share of the heavy lifting to protect our airlines. Now it's our time and our turn.

I told these groups that it is in management's best interest to improve labor/management relations. Airlines that treat their employees as partners will flourish in the coming years, and those that do not will struggle. Here is what management needs to do to improve its standing with us:

First, management needs to consult pilots. Recently, American Airlines acknowledged that it erred by bidding on

new China routes before obtaining an agreement with pilots over work-rule changes required for them to fly ultra-long-range flights. Continental management bargained for a PBS system to save millions of dollars with agreed future enhancements, but the new system has not yet met those requirements.

Second, management must address the degradation in pilots' quality of life. The bankruptcy era forced employees to work longer hours and more days for less pay and fewer benefits, furloughed many, and required others to move or commute to keep working. Mergers and industry consolidation will be profitable only if our members' concerns are addressed.

This issue affects more than pilots. I reminded my audiences that when they fly, their pilots may have worked 16 hours a day for 18 or more days per month. Pilots are tired, and management must address scheduling, staffing, and flight/duty time, and other quality-of-work-life issues.

Third, employees have to share in improved financial performance. Pilots deserve more than inadequate profit-sharing plans that return a small percentage of their concessions. Many pilots lost a major percentage of income and retirement plans, and now they must pay much more for their health coverage.

Across the board, managers are receiving raises and huge rewards. This caused United pilots to launch a forceful campaign called FIN ("Fix It Now") rather than wait for their December 2009 amendable date. Management is sitting down with pilots, but we are waiting to see if proposed solutions will adequately address our concerns.

Management of US Airways was trying to land its next trophy by buying another airline, rather than completing the merger of US Airways and America West and conducting serious bargaining on a single pilot contract. Elsewhere, Atlantic Southeast management has stalled negotiations for far too long.

In general, management must sit down with its pilots, admit that company performance is better than predicted, and share the results of financial performance, valuations, and profits. I told the audiences that pilots are willing to work with management, but management must acknowledge that workers' sacrifices are not permanent.

The door is open to mutual solutions, if management takes seriously the issues that we've put on the table. Now it's up to management to walk through the door and sit down with us.

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