

Pilot Standards

The U.S. government anticipates that the number



of airports handling more than 500,000 flights per year will triple by 2025. Airports in New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Boston, and Los Angeles are already reaching the limits of system capacity. And in that year, we expect to handle 1 billion passengers, just in the domestic market. The question is: How well is our industry preparing for this growth? The answers are mixed at best.

When first hired as pilots at Continental, my classmates' experience ranged from 2,000 hours of military jet time to more than 5,000 hours of commercial flying, which was fairly standard across the airlines. A full schedule of flying was 75 to 79 hours. Today, some regional airlines are hiring new pilots with as few as 250 hours, can't fill their classes, and are then canceling flights because of a lack of pilots. Too many pilots from all ALPA pilot groups are reporting that their managers are pushing them to fly to the 100-hour domestic monthly limit or even more under international rules. I have raised the red flag for ALPA before Congress, to management, and in the public that this combination has led to high levels of pilot fatigue and must be stopped. Adding to the mix is the increasing international acceptance of multicrew pilot

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licenses [see "MPLs Are Coming," page 20], which seek to push real flight time experience levels even lower.

The first step in addressing the pilot shortage is to attract the best and brightest to our industry by offering contractually guaranteed wages and benefits that reflect the responsibilities that airline pilots bear. ALPA is already working with the FAA, Transport Canada, and airline managements to refine and update training programs to position the next generation of airline pilots to carry on our union's motto, Schedule with Safety.

ALPA was founded 76 years ago as part of a fight for a safer system. No other organization holds ALPA's depth and breadth of safety and security knowledge or line pilot experience. As our industry seeks to transform today's system to meet new demands, ALPA and our members will be front and center. Airline pilots are the foundation of a safe, secure, and stable U.S. air transportation system. We expect and will demand at the bargaining table to be treated as such, and must not accept anything less when exercising our command authority on each

flight. The post-9/11 bankruptcy era is over, and we must convince individual managements that contract standards of pay, benefits, retirement plans, and work rules must be addressed now. Those who are enamored with low-cost pilots and actually seek high pilot turnover must be shown that their short-term view will not succeed in the airline industry.

To move forward, airline managements, aircraft manufacturers, and government agencies need to acknowledge and accept a central truth when dealing with us: the standards of the piloting profession must be rebuilt. These include a level of respect for and willingness to consult with pilots, a quality of work life that contributes to safety and security, and pay and benefits that recognize pilot contributions to the health of our companies and industry—and ensure that the industry can attract qualified candidates to our profession.

Industry financial performance has been better than predicted during our days in bankruptcy, and balance sheets have been repaired faster. CEOs and upper management are quickly grabbing their piece of the pie and telling us we won't be getting ours.

I have news for them. Pilot collective bargaining agreement standards must be rebuilt and maintained. ALPA will not back away from reestablishing the contract standards that reward employees, provide our passengers with qualified and rested pilots, and attract new men and women to join our ranks.

That's why I am pouring resources into our Strategic Preparedness and Strike Committee and our Collective Bargaining Committee. And that's why we must be willing to hit the streets together—anywhere, anytime, to make a statement. Our fight to restore the pride and standards to our profession will not be won by picketing one airline or once a month. It will be won by continual financial and shoe-leather support for the pilots in the thick of their contract campaigns—from Alaska to US Airways and America West; from Atlantic Southeast, far too far past the amendable date, to Mesa and Continental, about to start. We will increase our efforts at United, Northwest, and others to convince their managements to address and fix the problems now.

The challenges we face as we prepare for a billion passengers per year are formidable; so is the power of the partnership that will result from rebuilding the standards of our profession. As pilots, we understand the strength of unity and collective action. Management will exploit any weakness in our solidarity. Should any underestimate our resolve to restore our profession, they will have made the same mistake that proved disastrous for managers no longer in our industry.

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