

## At the Controls

### The recently held May Executive Board



meeting featured a set of very real and deep challenges for ALPA. The loss of representation rights at US Airways, the looming potential for other large-scale airline mergers, and the skyrocketing cost of fuel served as a harsh backdrop to the work of your MEC chairmen.

But those leaders did what ALPA leaders have always done: They dealt with the agenda items before them, debated the details, and made clear decisions on where they wanted their union to go. In the end, the meeting was more than just a success—it was a statement to all our members that ALPA is strong enough to absorb blows from all comers and react with unity. The decisions they made will pay dividends to our members for generations to come.

Leading up to the meeting, we saw a handful of our pilot groups deal with the end of their proud histories. Aloha, ATA, Champion, and Skyway have all seen their flying disappear, and their airlines are in various states of dissolution. But in each case, our pilots have remained unified and optimistic about their futures. Why? Because they know that their professional identity means more than their airline's name. They are ALPA pilots who will remain ALPA pilots.

I have been particularly impressed by the ability and willingness of ALPA's other pilot groups and our staff to help our pilots land on their feet. In some cases, ALPA MEC chairmen have worked to get preferential interviews and hiring for our members, giving them a chance to move on very quickly. The ALPA-sponsored job fairs that have sprouted up across the system have given even more pilots the opportunity to fly again.

In each case, our legal staff and outside counsel have fought tirelessly to make sure that every grievance is heard—so that justice can prevail and our pilots can receive what they are owed. Elsewhere, our staff has worked with legislators and state agencies to ensure that healthcare and employment benefits are guaranteed to our furloughed or unemployed members. And our Pilot Assistance Committee was immediately available to help with any job-loss trauma.

Two speakers at our Executive Board meeting summed up the deep well of support that ALPA provides. First was the Champion MEC chairman, Capt. Matt Marsh. His airline is forfeiting its future and closing down for good. But Matt and his pilots aren't in despair; in fact, they could not be more proud of the job they did and the legacy they are leaving.

"Many Champion pilots benefited and continue to benefit from being part of the Air Line Pilots Association," he said. "A lot of times we don't think about it, but if a pilot has an aero-medical problem, we can call Dr. Hudson. If a pilot has an

FAA question, we can call [the Legal Department's] Jim Johnson. When a pilot has a different sort of FAA issue, we can call [Engineering and Air Safety Director] Keith Hagy.

"These are the benefits that we have by being part of this Association. Don't ever forget how important these things are—how important the solidarity and the brotherhood that we have here are to each pilot and each pilot group because we all wear these wings. It's important to all of us, and we must remember that."

The Skyway MEC chairman, Capt. Randy Schmidt, also addressed the Board. His airline flew its last flights in April, but he, too, is proud of his pilots' history and contributions to ALPA. "ALPA was there every step of the way for us. From

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helping us negotiate our contract to defending that contract when it was abused by management, our union fought for us. Our airline may be gone, but the spirit of our pilot group will live on—because we are proud ALPA pilots."

When we rotate our airliners and navigate to our destinations, we understand what we do—and do not—control. We control our altitude; we do not control turbulence at that altitude. We control our airspeed; we do not control the headwind. We control our heading, not the weather at the airport.

Union work is a lot like piloting. We deal with the external factors of our industry by making sound, pilot-minded decisions about what we can control. In these times of moderate to severe turbulence, we must remain focused on what we can do to weather the storms. We cannot spend any time complaining about factors that we cannot control.

I am proud to serve as your president during these challenging times because I am surrounded by ALPA leaders who are acting in the best interest of their members and raising their games to new levels. You should be proud, too.

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