

I Hope You Never Need ALPA

Airline pilots are, by nature and training, exceedingly confident in their ability to manage risk. After all,



that's what we do for a living—make critical decisions on how to manage resources so that we never run out of altitude, airspeed, and ideas at the same time. And we wouldn't be worth our wings if we doubted our ability to do it well.

But despite all our talents and experience, we all know stories about harrowing moments in pilots' careers when the routine exploded into a full-blown emergency. Facing the reality of the situation, those pilots had to rely on crisis management, creative thinking, teamwork, and—of course—their training and experience to land in one piece.

As a fellow pilot who's flown stripped-down, round-engine freighters to B-777s, I know that one of the threats that make my heart beat a little faster is the prospect of thick smoke in the cockpit. No amount of training and simulator time can prepare you for the challenge of trying to fly when you can't see a thing, you're sucking on oxygen while adjusting goggles, trying to communicate with your crew, ATC, and passengers, and know only that something is burning somewhere out of sight.

Just as I hope that you are one of those pilots who never need to deal with an in-flight emergency like cockpit smoke, I hope you never need the vast and deep resources of your union to come to your aid in time of need. I hope you never lose your medical and have to rely on professional guidance to get it back. I hope you never get wrongfully terminated and need help to get back on the job or to get hired elsewhere. I hope you never lose your home to natural disaster, end up in the chief pilot's office to explain why you called in sick twice, or find yourself all alone in a foreign country facing criminal accusations for decisions you made in the cockpit.

But the numbers tell us that, eventually, you will probably need your union. Every day, in fact, hundreds of ALPA members tap into their union's toolbox to help them with the very situations I have just described. Every day our master executive council benefits specialists get calls from members struggling to navigate the minefield of health insurance coverage or retirement issues. Every day our contract administrators and legal team deal with new grievances filed by pilots who have been victims of contract abuse or face litigation filed by anti-union managements. And every day our aeromedical doctors handle calls from pilots who are facing health problems that threaten their livelihoods, while our safety team responds whenever a pilot uses the orange card to report an incident or accidents.

I am willing to bet that if you asked the members we are highlighting in our "ALPA Had My Back" articles in this issue of *Air Line Pilot* [starting on page 18], they would tell you that they never expected to personally call on ALPA either. Most would agree that they understand that the primary reason we join together is to share resources and experiences to bargain collectively; confront bankruptcies and mergers; advocate for pro-pilot regulations and laws; and fight for safety enhancements that we hammer out of the manufacturers and industry. ALPA does this and does it well.

But beyond that, ALPA is just a monthly magazine, a line item on their pay stub, and a code-a-phone every week or so. You may think so, too. You may think you are that rarest of



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pilots who will never have an inflight emergency or will never need to ask for your union's help. I hope you're right. But I wouldn't bet on it, just like I wouldn't bet that nothing will ever go wrong at altitude.

That's why we cannot afford to take these resources for granted. The services and strength of ALPA exist for one simple reason: Generations of members have dedicated their time, energy, and money to build our union and provide us with a legacy of respect, backed up by the financial resources we rely upon. There is simply no way to duplicate all that ALPA offers.

That legacy is now in our hands, and it is up to us to be there for each other, so that our union will be there when an individual, a single pilot group, or our entire profession needs it. As we prepare for the upcoming Board of Directors meeting, our focus will remain on strengthening our collective resolve—to ensure that ALPA will be there for you and for future generations of airline pilots.

