

Acts of Trust



By Capt. John Prater, ALPA President



Every day, strangers board our aircraft to fly with us to their destination of choice. We may only exchange pleasantries or knowing looks, but we know they trust us to perform our job flawlessly. And if anything does go wrong, passengers expect us to use our experience, skill, and knowledge to retain complete control of our airliners as they defy the laws of gravity.

That's an enormous act of trust. And we've rightly earned that trust by delivering millions of passengers and tons of freight safely on millions of flights, every day of the year. As pilots, we take our responsibilities seriously. And we expect the governing officials who regulate our industry to recognize that their actions have immediate and sometimes unintended consequences.

Congress and the news media have put the airline industry, our profession, the FAA, and the NTSB on trial. And with all of the attention that high-profile aviation events attract, all of us swim in the same fishbowl of public attention. It is unnecessary to review details, but there are few pilots, regulators, or congressmen who cannot relate to the airline events in just the past 10 months.

I will proudly place our record as a profession against all comers—especially those who sit behind desks for a living while they pass judgment on those of us who fly. I know what you face day in and day out—in the air and on the ground—and I know that you do it proudly and professionally.

Yes, the distractions you face at home and at work are real. From the realities of family financial ruin and lost jobs to downgrades, abusive schedules, and destroyed wages and pensions, I know you have suffered since 9/11. I know how managements and our government have used that dark September day to declare war on airline labor contracts. Now, I'm asking you to trust what I'm going to say here as much as I trust you with my family in the cabin of your airplane. ALPA will use all available means to protect this profession and advance regulatory and legislative initiatives that will improve an already safe air transportation system.

We will meet with Department of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood to explain the realities of the airline industry and the unsafe practices and pressures that pilots face due to extreme cost-cutting measures by this industry. We will meet with both the FAA administrator and NTSB chairwoman to express our deep concerns about how their recent reactions to satisfy the news media thirst have

cracked the confidence of our pilots to freely participate in advancing aviation safety.

We will meet with National Mediation Board members to explain that undue delays in contract bargaining or grievance resolutions do long-term damage to labor-management relations, which have their own consequences and adverse effects on the future of this industry. I will not rest until every influential agency understands how the government's actions have put aviation safety systems at risk and have imperiled programs built on a foundation of trust.

All this attention comes at a time when everyone is keeping a close watch on this profession—and how our pilots carry out their responsibility to uphold our Code of Ethics. Two months ago, I asked each of your master executive coun-

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cil and local council reps to stress the importance of all of us living up to the ideals established in ALPA's Code of Ethics.

Now, I respectfully ask each of you to honestly conduct a self-critique. I ask that you reemphasize cockpit discipline and professionalism in your preflight crew briefings and discuss how best to combat ever-present distractions. I know this is standard operating procedure for most of you already, and I respect you for your professionalism.

In the end, it's up to us to instill these values and educate all airline pilots about what ALPA has done for the profession, as well as the many services and benefits we provide that help elevate our members to *the professional standard*. Just as we have throughout our proud 77-year history, ALPA members will continue to have a positive effect on this industry.

Together, we can better prepare pilots today—and future generations—for what lies ahead. Together, we can ensure professionalism throughout our ranks and uphold the integrity we strive to live by each and every day!