

Who Will Be Our Advocate?

In January, I came to Washington, D.C., with certain preconceived notions about how things work in our government.

Before I could get settled as ALPA's president, I ended up with an expired FAA reauthorization bill, significant flight- and duty- time concerns, and questions about foreign ownership.

I learned quickly that in this town there's an entire cottage industry whose primary focus is to regulate and influence the profits of the airline industry, and its sole job is to make sure absolutely nothing gets done. Washington always seems to be at a stalemate—even when working within a structured process that involves all stakeholders: industry, labor, and government.



For example, it's an indisputable fact that a long-term, fully funded FAA reauthorization bill is critical to the entire aviation industry. It would provide crucial improvements to our national airspace system. One extension I can understand, but 22 extensions in four years clearly illustrate how those who work within the U.S. aviation system don't have an advocate in Washington.

The Department of Agriculture advocates on behalf of farmers, and the Treasury Department advocates for Wall Street financiers. The Department of Transportation is supposed to work to advance the U.S. air transportation system; but because the agency is responsible for several modes of transportation, more often than not you hear about bike paths and high-speed rail subsidies rather than improving air transportation infrastructure and enhancing our airspace.

If you go back 10-plus years, the airlines had strong proponents within the industry and government. Today, however, the U.S. government seems to not fully support aviation initiatives, and airline CEOs aren't stepping up to the plate, which leaves us with a significant lack of leadership.

While I believe that America can adequately compete when we have a level playing field, we're now attempting to compete without having any advocates in Washington. With significant growth in other parts of the world, we can't afford to be complacent or indecisive in how we approach the future of aviation. We are falling behind. Who will be our advocate for air transport? If we can't get together to fund a long-term bill that supports the U.S. aviation system, how are we going to compete internationally?

As the airline industry has become a global network, the rise of some foreign airlines, specifically those in the Middle East, has made competition unbalanced. These airlines are de facto government owned, are based in countries in which pilots have no representation, hire employees—including

pilots—who receive considerable U.S. government tax relief, and have financed many of their airliners at favorable interest rates acquired through U.S. and European banks.

In Canada, the United Arab Emirates has forcefully lobbied for greater access to Canadian destinations, using Canadian military access to Emirates soil as a trade weapon. The Canadian government has refused to permit additional access to Canadian markets. This is just one example of the need to focus on this issue and think strategically. U.S. and Canadian airlines can compete with any carriers in the world, but we must establish a strategic plan to level the playing field. It's imperative that we develop a cooperative relationship among labor, management, and regulators to shape the direction that globalization will take on our continent.

The U.S. is now a party to more than 100 Open Skies agreements. Within these agreements are several facts that we need

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to accept: government-subsidized airlines have an economic advantage, there are countries that outlaw the unionization of airline employees, and not all Open Skies agreements are created equal. With that in mind, we need to ensure that our contracts, our safety standards, and our flying are not negatively affected.

Our intent is to work with others to solidify the aviation industry in North America so that we can better compete on an international level. We're looking for advocates, and we'll continue to press on and strive to improve our aviation system until those advocates decide to get with the program and do what's right for our aviation system and, ultimately, America.

Donald J. Moak
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