

Uncomfortable Yet?

When he returned to Apple, Steve Jobs is purported to have created ad copy about change makers, whom he described by saying, "You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify, or vilify them. About the only thing you can't do is ignore them." There's no question that those who seek to change the status quo make people uncomfortable.

I saw this clearly when, in January, I attended a panel discussion that included an ALPA staffer—a subject-matter expert on U.S. government policy. ALPA seized the opportunity to lay out a powerful argument as the moderator moved the discussion to one of ALPA's cornerstone issues: the dire negative consequences of allowing U.S. policy to continue to bend in the favor of already well-financed foreign carriers while treating U.S. airlines as a bottomless bank account.

It was a softball opportunity to outline ALPA's position on leveling the playing field. Many pilots and staff could recite the main points flawlessly if called upon. What was interesting—and something I had not yet observed in this typically amicable airline industry forum—was that another panelist seated with our ALPA staffer was clearly becoming very uncomfortable.

The panelist, an airport executive at a facility that recently welcomed service by a state-owned foreign airline, finally spoke in response to ALPA's position of fair competition. He simply said, and I'll paraphrase, "Our airport has benefited greatly from these carriers. Our international numbers are way up."

The mechanical response was deafening. But I believe it must have been hard for him to speak up after hearing about just how harmful an unlevel playing field is to the future of the U.S. airline industry and how, as an airport executive, he bears some responsibility for actively courting these silver-spooned carriers that are threatening the U.S. airline industry and our jobs. I believe he spoke out of obligation to his stakeholders, who hold him accountable for bringing business to the airport and revenue to the city. I say this because, in side conversations, everyone agrees that they don't want to be responsible for airline pilots losing their flying or their jobs. They very much want to support the airline industry, which is a huge economic engine for North America. But they are only doing their job—increasing travel stats, generating more revenue, and securing additional funding or grants for airport improvements. It's simply their job.

Well, it's *our* job to advocate for the members of ALPA in every aspect of their careers. And, unapologetically, if it's during a panel discussion on globalization or a news media interview that exposes the advantages enjoyed by state-supported foreign airlines or a candid conversation with elected officials about our opposition to backroom deals that do not position U.S. airlines for success, ALPA will be the one to never shy away from making people uncomfortable with the status quo that harms our industry or our profession.

It's our job—at the negotiating table, in the courtroom, during an accident investigation, and in the midst of FAR rule changes. It's our job to protect our profession and our industry. Interestingly enough, a representative of a foreign carrier recently referred to us as "protectionist." And you know what? He's damn right.

Now does this mean we are unwilling to compromise? Absolutely not. ALPA has been able to achieve important progress in areas such as reforming the Export-Import Bank's lending practices and ensuring that Fly America flying is performed by U.S. airlines because we are unwilling to let perfect be the enemy of good. And when we don't get a complete win, we go back to work the next day for the rest, continuing our pilot-partisan mission.

The U.S. airline industry is first in its class. But we're losing ground. The international market share that has for decades

belonged to U.S. airlines is now under threat from state-owned airlines and U.S. government policies that harm U.S. airlines' ability to compete. A recent—and particularly glaring—example of such a U.S. government policy is Congress's approval of full funding for a U.S. Customs and Border Protection preclearance facility at Abu Dhabi International Airport. Because it would benefit only a state-owned foreign airline and no U.S. carriers, the U.S. taxpayer-funded facility puts

U.S. airlines at a significant competitive disadvantage. We will redouble our efforts in our fight against this and any other government policy that harms U.S. airlines in their drive to compete globally.

And it's not just the government. The news media are reporting more and more frequently that some travelers prefer to travel on foreign carriers. Pro-business journalists are pitching the new business models for airline companies as "innovative" rather than illegal.

Most of us look at performing our job every day as our most important mission. What we may lose sight of is that our mission will cease to exist if our industry ceases to exist.

We can't let this happen. Our job has expanded, and we're embarking on a demanding education and information campaign, reaching out to all who will listen: regulators, legislators, management, other unions, passengers, and cargo shippers.

The partnerships we form, the relationships we build, and the reputation that is ALPA's hallmark will allow ALPA the opportunity to change the way the U.S. government backs our airlines. We will prevail, even if it comes at the cost of making people uncomfortable. 🍷



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Donald Lee Moak
Capt. Lee Moak, ALPA President