

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

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Dear Fellow Pilot,

If you are not concerned, you are not paying attention. We are in a global conflict, and the forces on the field are awe-inspiring. Our industry is now on the front lines of the centuries-old struggle of globalization. Just as “flags of convenience” reshaped the maritime industry in the 1900s, the airline industry is under pressure for a radical change, and every element of our profession is threatened.

The Association sees the threat and is working to enlist pilots in the fight. Our strategy relies on aggressive engagement in every arena, both as a union and as individuals. Our careers, our profession, and the U.S. airline industry are at stake; we all must take responsibility. Every action you take matters. Although inaction is also a choice, I hope to persuade you that such a course of action is an unacceptable risk.

We analyze and manage risk every time we fly. I ask you to expand your focus beyond today’s flight and contract, and account for every threat in your strategic thinking. The union can wage the pilots’ fight on multiple fronts, but we need you.

By now, you should know how unfair foreign competition threatens our profession, so I will not recount the details here. Instead, I offer you a brief historical perspective on the scale of the issue and the effort required of us to address it.

U.S. mariners faced the same globalization threat in the last century and failed to overcome it, or, more accurately, to adapt and use it to their advantage. The parallels between our two professions are clear: international industries, crucial to the economy, driven by technology, and rapidly changed by globalization. This discussion of the shipping industry should give airline pilots pause. I hope history will show that the pilots learned from their predecessors’ experience: *American mariners watched their industry and profession for all intents disappear.*

Technologies and market forces changed shipping just as they transformed industries and societies for millennia. As the environment changes, adaptation is required for survival.

The U.S. shipping industry’s market share has decreased steadily since the 1860s, while global maritime tonnage increased exponentially, from about 26 million tons in 1900 to almost 700 million tons today. Lloyd’s Register predicts worldwide gross tonnage of 19 to 24 billion by 2030. *But today, less than 2 percent of international shipping carries the*

U.S. flag. Instead, they carry flags of convenience. The owners may be from developed countries, but the flag of the ship is one of convenience to gain many advantages: tax avoidance, skirting national labor and environmental regulations, hiring crews at lower wages, and lower registration and maintenance costs. All these contribute significantly to lower overall transportation costs for the owner.

Additionally, the tremendous increases in gross tonnage reflect vessel size, not fleet growth. Maritime technology has increased efficiency and decreased crew requirements as shipping progressed from oared galleys to supertankers. New technologies open routes and change industry paradigms. Transportation industry leaders adopt these advancements to use economies of scale and enter new markets. Transportation is one of four pillars of globalization, along with communications, standardization, and trade liberalization. With this in mind, the airline industry offers the perfect laboratory conditions for globalization, and capital will seek its advantages. Inexorable and patient, market forces are like a river eroding into bedrock. We must find a way to harness them, developing a strategy for our times.

The MEC met in May to evaluate and refine its strategy. The threats to our industry, profession, and airline are very real. We are all keenly aware of the challenges we have faced in the past, and the time to act is now. Waiting is simply not an acceptable strategy.

Protecting your career cannot just be outsourced to those willing to do the work. It is not a battle, it is a war, and we will not be the last generation in the fight. Every action you take matters. Every call, e-mail, letter, ALPA-PAC donation, and pilot you talk to adds to the cumulative effect. We must be a visible force on Capitol Hill to effect the changes we need in a national airspace policy and defend against foreign ownership, cabotage, and unfair Open Skies agreements. We must be a force in international aviation affairs for the same reasons.

The Delta pilots must lead the industry in this fight. We can either work to determine our future or let it be determined for us. We need you to pay attention and join in. When you are asked to participate, do so. The challenge before us is very clear. Your career is at stake. Our industry is under attack. And, your family's future is at risk. The time to act is now.

Fraternally,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kingsley Roberts', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Captain Kingsley Roberts
Delta MEC Chairman