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September 17, 2013

ALPA vs. Independents *What every Delta pilot needs to know*

"We must act collectively. There is no middle of the road on this proposition. You must be whole-heartedly with your brother pilots." - Dave Behncke, Oct 1931

The source of the clout and relevance of the Air Line Pilots Association is its roster of members, more than fifty thousand professional aviators who combine their efforts and dues money to improve their way of life. Common problems overcome by common cause, because nothing impacting our industry happens in a vacuum - what affects one pilot labor group always affects the others.

In previous communiqués we have debunked numerous false claims made by DPA organizers. At the root of their propaganda is a tired argument that our dues should be spent solely for the benefit of the Delta pilots, because the welfare of other pilot groups has nothing to do with the welfare and career progress of the Delta pilots. The DPA then goes a step further and asserts that not only are our fortunes not affected by events at other pilot groups, but that organizations which represent more than one pilot group have an inherent conflict of interest.

This assertion exists in a vacuum, because it completely disregards the democratic independence of every pilot, every LEC, and every MEC in ALPA. Each pilot group is free to negotiate and ratify working agreements, free to decide for themselves which path to take. Our own C2012 is proof of this freedom.

Isolationist policy ignores the highly competitive and interconnected nature of the aviation industry. Ultimately this strategy is self-defeating and not borne out by history.

Any industry analyst will tell you that pilot compensation is one of the most critical cost components of commercial aviation operations. As Robert Crandall once observed, passenger air travel is as perfectly a competitive an industry as exists in modern business, and a carrier which pays a pilot less has an enormous competitive advantage and creates immediate pressure on its competitors to level the playing field, i.e. the "race to the bottom". American secured such an advantage in the 1980s through implementation of a non-merging B-Scale system for pay and pension. The purported professional negotiator for the Allied Pilots Association in that era made clear that the APA's status as an independent union gave it the flexibility to make this arrangement, "flexibility" that was immediately demanded by every other major carrier. The resulting race to the bottom for new hire and junior pilots was only

broken when ALPA remained steadfast at United and, with the assistance of all other ALPA represented groups including the Delta pilots, was able to withstand the economic and political pressure brought by United and successfully resist an American Airlines style B-Scale system.

There is a more recent example. The Allied Pilots Association recently had to deal (as we did) with the bankruptcy of their company. During the course of reorganization the company committed to all its labor groups that it would provide industry standard pay by September of 2015.

“Industry standard” was defined as the average of the rates paid by the other major hub and spoke carriers: Delta, United, and US Airways. The US Airways pilots, who have not been able to secure a contract in the five years since they left ALPA, were much further behind the industry than any other group on the property and their presence as a factor in the industry standard formula devalued the adjustment for American pilots far more than other crafts or classes. Ultimately the APA was able to diminish, but not eliminate, the weight of the US Airways rates in the final formula. The point, though, is that USAPA’s bargaining failures did not happen in a bubble. The effects were widespread, and ultimately limited what could have been available to the American pilots in their new contract.

Four major pilot groups have left ALPA since its formation. Two of those groups— CAL and FedEx—subsequently returned and now work under contracts which are far better than those they had as independents. As most know, APA was formed fifty years ago in response to a dispute over the three-man cockpit. It has since rejected its B-Scale legacy along with those who counseled it and works closely with ALPA. That leaves the US Airways pilots and you can judge for yourself whether the USAPA experiment has been a success.

We should all be aware of the dangers of balkanization of our profession. The common definition of “balkanization” is “to divide a region or territory into small, often hostile units.” It is also described as “the breakdown of cooperative arrangements due to the rise of independent competitive entities engaged in ‘beggar thy neighbor’ bidding wars.” Balkanization has not proven to be a path for progress in geopolitics, and in collective bargaining it is a proven strategy for isolating and denying our group the financial, economic, and political assistance of other pilot groups and the labor movement as a whole.

We have come a long way since the depths of 2006, and are now poised to move forward with 2015 negotiations. Dealing with a decertification threat is a sideshow diverting our attention from this opportunity. Decertification of ALPA is nothing more than a path to destruction of what we have built together; most assuredly delaying or denying the Delta pilots the progress that we are entitled to.