

# Committee Corner

## News from ALPA's Committees

### Federal Air Marshal Service Now Running FFDO Program, Promises Improvements

The Federal Air Marshal Service (FAMS) convened a Federal Flight Deck Officer (FFDO) Focus Group meeting on Dec. 7, 2005, at the FAMS Transportation Security Operations Center near Washington Dulles International Airport. This event, in conjunction with a message from the Transportation Security Administration Office of Law Enforcement and FAMS Director Tom Quinn that was posted on the Dashboard, the website for FFDOs, signaled the FFDO program's official move to the FAMS.

John Novak, assistant director of the FAMS Office of Flight Operations, welcomed ALPA aviation security representatives and other attendees and explained the purpose of the meeting—primarily, to discuss the reasons the FAMS has taken over the program, show ALPA and other attendees the support structure the FAMS has brought to the FFDO program, and to listen to FFDOs' issues.

Quinn delivered a message of welcome, saying, "It's a new day," this is "the tip of the javelin... working together is key... let's put the past behind us [and] work toward the future, [and] focus on the threat, mission, and strategy."

As one of the first initiatives in this transfer of the FFDO program to the FAMS, Quinn said that they have heard ALPA's and others' concerns about the lack of intelligence being disseminated to field FFDOs and will now provide a weekly situational brief to all FFDOs via the Dashboard.

Attendees watched the 12-minute video, "Partners with



the Aviation Industry." Capt. Barry Kendrick (America West) worked on this project as part of an industry working group. The video is designed to give airline employees, particularly flight crews, a better idea of the FAMS mission. It was to be distributed to industry partners in January 2006. Airlines are urged to show the video during recurrent training.

Tours of FAMS offices put a face on the support attendees have and will receive.

The TSA General Manager for Airports acted as facilitator for an open discussion that lasted more than 2 hours. Besides arrest authority/liability and training, topics discussed included ideas for facilitating international car-

riage—e.g., the United States has agreements with some countries to allow FAMS on quick turns who don't clear Customs to keep their service weapon on their person; the need for more discreet airport access; and special needs and considerations of all-cargo crews.

According to the FAMS, all communications will come

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via the Dashboard for now. Much more information will be available to FFDOs soon. FFDOs will be assigned to FAMS field offices. Logistics remain to be determined, but FFDOs may have a choice of being attached to an office near their home or base.

In 2006, FAMS will convene smaller working groups on weapon carriage, credentials and badges, training, and communications. Focus groups with greater participation will be held quarterly. Information on these groups and an application mechanism to participate in them will be forthcoming on the Dashboard.

FAMS initiatives for FFDOs include the following:

- Weekly situational awareness briefings will be delivered each Thursday, Tactical Information Branch (TIB) News each month, and other pertinent information as needed.
- FFDO requalification training, to be conducted at FAMS field offices, will be beefed up—possibly to 8 hours. Recurrent training will be developed. FFDOs should not expect to see any significant changes in the training program right away. The FAMS leaders first want to evaluate what has been developed to see if it satisfies the program's needs. In early 2006, the FAMS will convene a focus group to discuss and work on training issues.

#### FAMS structure

FAMS command staff gave an overview of their divisions:

- The FAMS Office of Field Operations oversees field offices and the Force Multiplier program.
- The Office of Training and Development oversees training and will emphasize FAM-quality training, which is to the highest standards within federal law enforcement. FFDOs will not be getting FAM training, but training on par, requisite to their mission. The FAMS will conduct

oversight, actual training, and requalification. Participants were promised inclusion in the process.

- The Office of Mission Support primarily focuses on budget and procurement and works on fulfilling equipment needs and requisite finances.

- The Investigations Division has three branches—Investigations, Intelligence, and Tactical Information. A fourth branch—Strategic Targeting—has been proposed.

—The Investigations Branch works on timely dissemination of threat information, coordinates investigations, and evaluates and coordinates dissemination of intelligence generated from various agencies, including the Joint Terrorism Task Force, the FBI, and many other law enforcement agencies.

—The Intelligence Branch provides current intelligence generated from the various agencies and provides briefings to headquarters and field office personnel.

—The Tactical Information Branch tracks and analyzes suspicious activities reported by FAMs and FFDOs or from crews via the electronic reporting mechanism, [famsreport@dhs.gov](mailto:famsreport@dhs.gov). This Branch, the key to surveillance detection (countersurveillance), provides the FAMs with Advisories, Be on the Lookout (BOLO) information, Amber Alert information (that pertains to aviation), and TIB News. Sensitive security information from this Branch will be disseminated via the Dashboard.

FAMS representatives said that their agency is very committed to making the FFDO program work. That commitment was evidenced by the fact that the entire command staff was present for this focus group, which rarely occurs.—*First Officer Robb Powers (Alaska), Deputy Director for Operations, ALPA National Security Committee*

## GAO Report Says Pension Terminations May Not Help Airlines

Bankrupt airlines that terminate defined-benefit pension plans may just be delaying the inevitable result of their inability to reduce operating costs, according to a report that the U.S. Government Accountability Office issued in September 2005. The GAO wrote the report at the request of Congress, which asked the agency to look into the effects of bankruptcies and underfunded pension plans on the airline industry.

Steven Martin, assistant director of transportation is-

sues at the GAO, presented the agency's findings to ALPA Retirement and Insurance Committee members in November 2005 at the Association's semi-annual R&I Seminar. ALPA volunteers gathered for the 2-day event to discuss issues relating to employee benefits, including health care, life insurance, disability insurance, and retirement plans. Martin explained to attendees that, while terminating pension plans may provide some short-term relief, it doesn't necessarily deal with the underlying issues that are the real cause of the airline industry's difficulties.

According to the report, since deregulation of the U.S. airline industry in 1978, 162 airline bankruptcy filings have occurred—22 of them in the last 5 years. While most of those bankruptcies occurred at small, new-entrant airlines that eventually underwent liquidation, four of the most recent bankruptcies—Delta, Northwest, United, and US Airways—are among the largest corporate bankruptcies ever to occur outside of the financial services industry.

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"While the airline industry has enjoyed some profitable years, the industry as a whole has lost money since deregulation," says Martin. "That instability is due to the basic structure of the industry and its economics."

Many airlines use bankruptcy as an opportunity to reduce costs by abrogating collective bargaining contracts and terminating defined-benefit employee pension plans. Once an airline has unburdened itself from these financial obligations, the company can then restructure itself into a leaner business entity. But that hasn't necessarily been the case. In fact, 88 percent of the carriers that have declared bankruptcy since deregulation have not reemerged, the report says. That may be the fate of the present crop of bankrupt carriers unless they are able to get their costs under control. Indeed, even without having to fund an employee pension plan, the average legacy carrier will continue to lose money.

The report underscores the urgent need for solutions to problems that have long plagued the airline industry. Intense competition, high fixed costs, and cyclical demand make airlines especially vulnerable to external factors that frequently result in heavy financial losses, says the GAO. Most recently, the airline industry has suffered because of the threat of terrorism and record-level fuel prices.

"Bankruptcy may provide some short-term solutions, but it's not a panacea," says Martin. "Airlines still need to address the underlying structural problems inherent in the industry."—*Gavin Francis, Staff Writer*