

PAC Mentality

There is an old saying: "If you want a friend in Washington, get a dog." Well, I do love dogs—in fact, I have four back in Illinois—but I don't plan to bring one to Washington. I'm not particularly interested in making friends here in D.C.; what I want is allies in our fight to take back our profession.



We need allies in Congress if we are going to make fundamental changes to the laws and regulations that govern our working lives. I'm talking about overhauling the bankruptcy code that managements have used to inflict maximum pain on us. I'm talking about reworking flight-time/duty-time regulations that leave us overworked, overwhelmed, and overtired. And I'm talking about transforming the airport screening process that treats us like part of the security problem and not part of the solution.

If you are happy with the bankruptcy code, flight-time regulations, and airport screening, stop reading here and move on to the rest of the magazine. But if you agree that we should be working to address even one of these issues, keep reading.

Now that I have your attention, let's talk about what it takes to get things done in Washington. It takes credibility: ALPA has worked for 76 years to develop a reputation of candor, professionalism, and expertise—that includes our technical and legal expertise, both unmatched in the rest of labor. Check that block. It takes communications skills: ALPA has a sophisticated lobbying and media relations operation that,

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among other successes, almost single-handedly defeated the foreign control scheme that the administration wanted so badly last year. Check that block (although we already see that threat back on the table again—we stand ready!).

But most of all it takes money, and in politics that means the hard dollars that feed a political action committee (PAC), which in turn can support congressional candidates who will fight for our issues. Unfortunately, in contrast to our credibility and communications programs, ALPA-PAC is losing ground.

In calendar year 2006, 14 percent of U.S. ALPA members made a voluntary donation to ALPA-PAC. That's down 1 percent from 2005, and down a sobering 16 percent from the PAC's heyday in 1983, which was during the midst of our

battle with Frank Lorenzo at Continental and other problems brought about by deregulation of the U.S. airline industry.

I know why the numbers are down: pilot salaries have been slashed; pensions were destroyed; work rules are brutal; the debate over Age 60 has heated up; and ALPA has had to use all its leverage just to play defense these past few years against an unfriendly Congress, a hostile White House, and an antiworker judiciary. I don't blame any pilot who looked at the headlines and decided not to give any of his or her hard-earned money to ALPA-PAC.

But the truth is that if we are going to take back all that we have lost, we must do better—soon. The election cycle for 2008—when one third of the Senate, all of the House, and the presidency will be decided—has already begun. The razor-thin margins in Congress are all that stand between progress and pain for our profession. If we are going to continue to play a strong role on Capitol Hill, we are going to need to reinvigorate our PAC.

ALPA-PAC has two incredible strengths. First, it is a bipartisan PAC dedicated to building a pro-ALPA majority around a core set of issues that affect the airline piloting profession and trade unionism in the aviation industry. I was encouraged when I met with the leaders of the new Congress and their key committees that work on pilot issues. They asked your union for our position. Your union has access that others crave.

The second strength is our PAC's incredible efficiency. Dollars given to ALPA-PAC go to candidates to help them get elected and reelected. On the list of union PACs that have raised funds over the last two years, we rank 25th. But in the rankings of union PACs' actual donations to candidates, we come in 9th place. That means that we are using your voluntary PAC donations for exactly what you intend—helping to get pro-pilot politicians elected to Congress.

Fellow pilots, we're at the decision point for ALPA-PAC. I am not setting any targets or telling you how much we need to raise to be effective. I am asking that you look at the issues before us, weigh their importance to your professional future, and consider making an investment in ALPA-PAC. We all have a dog in this fight.



A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "John Prater". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.