

Responding to the FAA's Challenge

A few weeks ago, I rode a United jumpseat.



The first officer was a returning furlougher who had served two tours in Iraq. We were talking about the challenges airline pilots face when he said, "I have time to make up what I lost, but what are you going to do for him?" pointing to the captain, who lost his pension and would have to retire in 3 years.

I thought to myself: This first officer should be union president—he gets it. He's not looking out for himself; he knows it's about the entire profession. We will need that spirit if we are going to take back our profession. Industry dynamics and regulatory changes will continue to affect us. Sharing the good and bad must become a way of life. Airline pilots have earned the respect of the flying public, and we must extend that respect to each other. There is not a separate ALPA for older, younger, Canadian, U.S., cargo, passenger, male, or female pilots. There is only *one* ALPA.

In January, we held the first two in a series of pilot road shows in Atlanta, Ga., and Charlotte, N.C. The pilots impressed me with their energy and commitment to their union. They came with ideas and expressed a willingness to do their part to take it back. I told them, "ALPA is here, and we will be here when you need us."

Next, I traveled to Chicago to join the United MEC and 400 United pilots in a rally to kick off their "Fix It Now!" campaign.

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Their dedication and enthusiasm were impressive. I pledged our support as they rebuild their devastated contract. Recently I met with Alaska Airlines pilot leaders, and their families, as they began negotiations and with Atlantic Southeast pilots as they near their own endgame after 52 months. Elsewhere, Atlas, Kitty Hawk, Mesa, and Polar ramp up toward negotiations; and America West and US Airways pilots are waging a joint contract fight with their management. I have also been in close coordination with Comair leaders and members who face management's threat of imposed pay and work rules.

All of these fights will test our unity. But one particular issue challenges our unity like no other: Age 60. When FAA Administrator Marion Blakey announced that she intended to

issue a notice of proposed rulemaking on the 1959 Age 60 rule to follow the changes in the International Civil Aviation Organization standard and the ARC report, it was a whole new ballgame. Opposing legislation that would change the rule—as ALPA policy directs—is one thing. But the FAA



rulemaking process is quite different. The FAA is careful to propose rulemaking only when the agency is convinced that a rule needs to change.

My primary concern is that this issue divides ALPA members and robs our union of the energy we need for other fights. Given the seriousness of this FAA action, ALPA must develop an effective and unifying approach to the NPRM. That is why I formed an ALPA Blue Ribbon Panel on Pilot Retirement, composed of representatives from the four committees most logically connected with the Age 60 issue: Safety, Retirement and Insurance, Collective Bargaining, and Human Performance (Aeromedical).

The Panel will study the effects of potential rule changes and develop recommendations that will allow ALPA to address pilot retirement and have a positive effect on ALPA members. Its work will reflect the highest level of safety that the Association has established. The Panel will present its report to the Executive Council and Executive Board in May, well in advance of any FAA NPRM release. Predicting the final rule's outcome is impossible, but only ALPA has the expertise and influence to protect pilots' interests in the rulemaking process. At press time, the Age 60 ARC is expected to receive further directions from the FAA administrator later in February. I have been appointed to co-chair the ARC, along with the head of the Air Transport Association, and we will have a say in how the rule takes form.

On behalf of ALPA's entire national leadership team, I thank you for your suggestions, advice and participation during our first months in office. I look forward to seeing you at an upcoming rally, picketing event, or road show. We can indeed take it back, but only if we stand together as one union and one profession.

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