



Prater, AFL-CIO Take Chicago by Storm

Race for 2008 gathers pro-worker momentum.

Few cities are more closely linked to the North American labor movement than Chicago. Accordingly, the Second City provided an ideal setting for the August 6-8 AFL-CIO Executive Council meeting and an AFL-CIO-sponsored U.S. presidential candidate debate. ALPA's president and AFL-CIO executive vice-president, Capt. John Prater, and other key labor leaders convened to conduct the business of the Federation and discuss political issues important to airline pilots and other working Americans.

"This Council meeting and our debate provide an opportunity to kick off a campaign for outlining what workers want from their next president," said Prater. "We will stress priorities that will directly address the needs of all American workers—not just the chosen few that the current administration has opted to placate."

The AFL-CIO Executive Council took one large step, endorsing plans for a major national healthcare reform campaign aimed at influencing the 2008 election and the next Congress. The plan calls for the mobilization of 1,000 activists as part of "An Economy That Works for All" and a rebuilding of the U.S. infrastructure.

The Executive Council also passed an aviation policy statement that calls on Congress to enact legislation that would support workers in an industry that is recovering slowly from a long downturn (see "Mismanaged Airlines Hurt Workers and Passengers," p.37).

"The issues affecting our nation's working families took front and center stage during this Council session," says AFL-CIO President John Sweeney. "We will make absolutely sure that the spotlight remains on working people's concerns—good jobs, affordable health

care, and the freedom to join and form unions to improve their lives."

In conjunction with the Executive Council meeting, the AFL-CIO hosted a presidential forum on August 7 at Chicago's Soldier Field, with the top seven Democratic candidates on hand. Republican candidates were also invited, but none chose to attend. The event

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was broadcast live on MSNBC and moderated by Keith Olbermann.

Participating presidential candidates included Sen. Joe Biden (D-Del.), Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.), Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.), former



Sen. John Edwards (D-N.C.), Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio), Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.), and Gov. Bill Richardson (D-N.M.).

More than 12,000 union members and their families from around the country, including Prater and a sizable contingent of ALPA members, including line pilots, MEC officers, and members of the Association's Strategic Preparedness and Strike Committee, attended the forum, listening to each candidate address issues that shape the U.S. workplace, such as job security, retirement, healthcare, globalization, and international trade agreements.

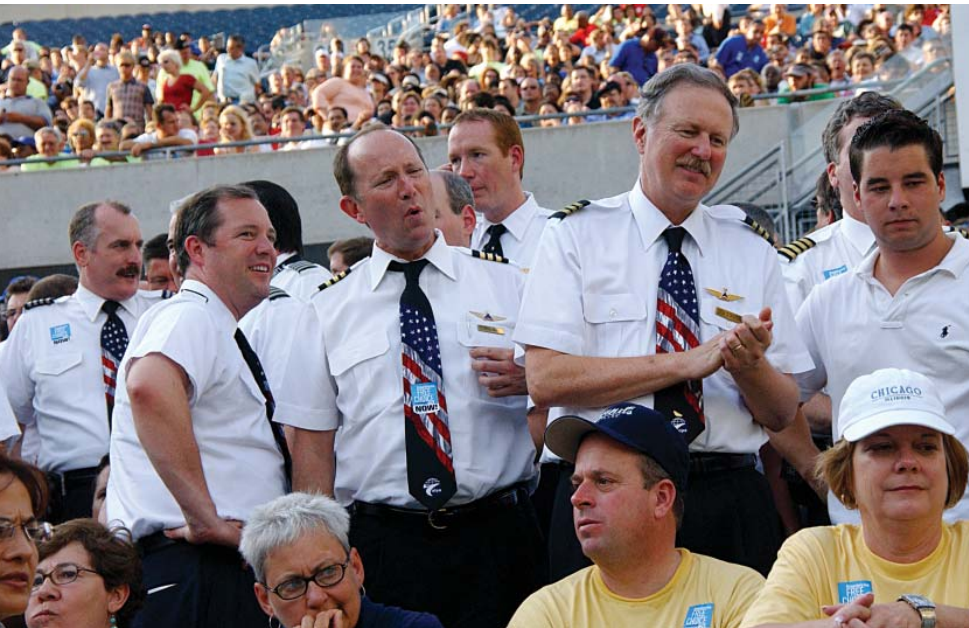
Prater and other labor leaders, during a break in the first day's afternoon schedule, were invited to visit Obama's national headquarters, where they conversed with the candidate's campaign manager and chief political aide. The Illinois senator maintains an entire floor of a downtown office building where a large, professional staff coordinates his campaign, similar to operations run by all top-tier contenders.

The AFL-CIO Executive Council opted to delay endorsement of any particular candidate at this time, leaving greater room for mobility as the primaries approach and the field narrows. In addition, the Federation's many members have communicated through polls and surveys that there are simply too many good choices at this point in the process.

Although ALPA is conducting the early stages of its own presidential endorsement campaign, the AFL-CIO has asked affiliates to wait until the General Board of the Federation decides whether to endorse a candidate before



PASS National President Tom Brantly, right, welcomes Capt. Prater to the PASS Executive Council meeting in Chicago.



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ALPA members, including Executive Council and Executive Board members, braved brutal temperatures to hear from Democratic Presidential candidates.

Mismanaged Airlines Hurt Workers and Passengers

[The following is excerpted from the AFL-CIO Executive Council Statement]

Clearly, the troubles faced by aviation workers and passengers are reaching crisis proportions. The AFL-CIO and its aviation unions will not allow airlines to further destroy the rights and jobs of aviation workers who are essential if airlines are to operate safely and efficiently and provide passengers with the best [air transportation] system in the world. We call on Congress and the administration to provide careful oversight of U.S. airlines to ensure that staffing levels, outsourcing, and poor labor-management relations do not affect safety or further erode customer service. We also call on Congress

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to examine the appropriateness of airlines enriching their CEOs and top management.... And finally, the AFL-CIO renews its call for Congress to step in and address the staffing crisis at the FAA and ensure that collective bargaining disputes at the agency are settled in a fair and impartial manner. 🌐

the primaries, and, if so, which candidate to support.

Meanwhile, the AFL-CIO is moving forward, working to build consensus on one candidate who can best work to support the American working family. The person who emerges from the pack, with labor's support, will be in a strong position to answer to the millions of rank-and-file U.S. workers and their families.

Prater made the most of his time while in Chicago, accepting an invitation to speak during a break on the second day of the Executive Council meeting with fellow aviation union members from the Professional Airways Systems Specialists (PASS). These FAA and Defense Department employees certify the safety and the efficiency of the National Airspace System, maintain the U.S. air traffic control system, and ensure the integrity, reliability, and safety of the airline and general aviation industries.

"Together with you and other professionals, pilots have made airline travel the safest mode of transportation in history," said Prater. "Our industry is also the key to U.S. economic strength. We should all be proud of what we have achieved."

Prater talked about labor solidarity in the airline industry, the congested national airspace system, and concerns with the FAA's current approach. Summing up his activities while in Chicago, Prater commented, "Airline workers must band together.... We all have a stake in who occupies the White House and who leads Congress. We must come to the table with a unified voice."—*John Perkinson, Staff Writer*