

# SPIRIT PILOTS MARCH TOWARD STRIKE

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*Editor's note: This article was written as Air Line Pilot went to press. By the time you read this, the Spirit pilots' strike deadline will have passed. What follows is a brief account of events leading up to the strike deadline. For updated information, go to [www.alpa.org](http://www.alpa.org).*

**S**pirit pilots have been marching a long road, but on June 12, their destination will be either a fair contract or the first strike by an ALPA pilot group in almost 5 years.

After nearly 4 years of bargaining and months of mediated negotiations, the pilots received confirmation of the 30-day cooling-off period from the National Mediation Board on May 12. The 30-day countdown is up on June 12 at 12:01 a.m. After that, the pilots are allowed to engage in a lawful strike.

The week before, the pilots have planned a head-on rush of events, which they hope will convince Spirit management that the best option for all parties is a fair and equitable deal that recognizes and rewards the contributions the pilots have made to the success of Spirit Airlines. Informational picketing is scheduled in the three domiciles—Atlantic City, Detroit, and Fort Lauderdale—on June 8, 9, and 10. On Friday, June 11, at 10:30 p.m., as the countdown winds down, the pilots will be picketing at all three locations, as well as at La Guardia Airport. At 12:01 a.m., June 12, without a fair contract, the pilots will be handed new picket signs announcing that the Spirit pilots are officially on strike.

"This fight has tested the mettle of each member of this pilot group," said Capt. Sean Creed, the pilots' Master Executive Council chairman. "We've had to endure being treated as mere overhead to a management that will wring every penny it can from an already strained employee group. No one wants a strike. However, with the support of our ALPA brothers and sisters, we are ready—and willing—to use that last weapon in our arsenal to get our contract."

Spirit Airlines has touted itself as an "ultra-low-cost carrier" and has made a niche for itself, especially on routes to South America and the Caribbean. Growing steadily, the airline

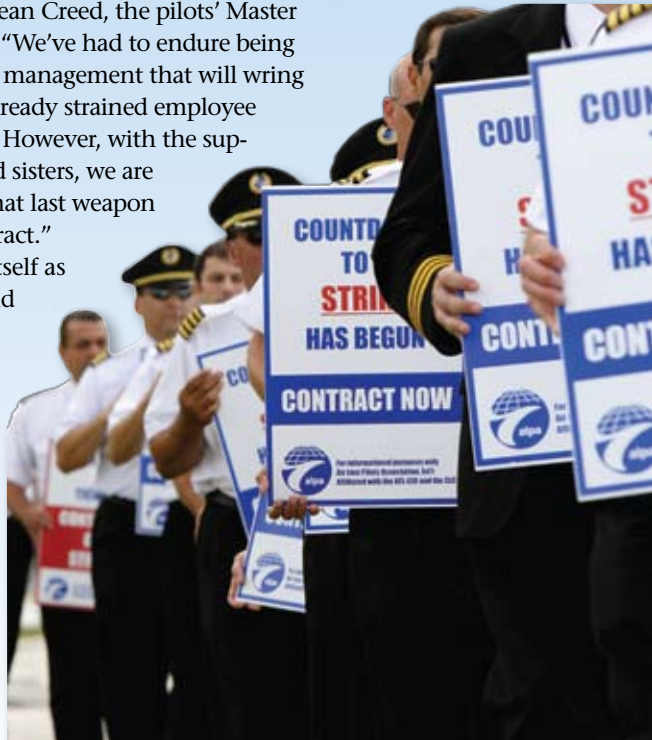
now flies to 40 destinations. In addition to making a name for itself through low fares, the airline has also gained a reputation for crude ad campaigns, adding a myriad of fees to base ticket prices, and selling advertising on everything from flight attendant aprons to air sickness bags. Even now, as the strike looms, the Spirit Airlines website is announcing additional routes starting in July.

During the week of June 7, the Spirit pilots' Negotiating Committee, along with the MEC, will be meeting for a full round of bargaining sessions, in a last-ditch effort to avoid a work stoppage. However, the two sides still remain far apart. The company, despite making millions of dollars in profit in each quarter, and continuously finding new ways to charge for "extras" (like carry-on luggage), is still demanding concessions from a pilot group that already makes 40 percent less than its highest-paid competitor.

The pilots are asking for pay increases that will move them closer to parity with pilots flying for competing low-cost carriers—airlines that management has repeatedly pointed to as comparable operators. The pilots are also asking for improvements in retirement and health benefits—the very things that management is seeking to cut.

"We are not asking to be the highest paid pilots flying the line," said Creed, "We're simply asking to be paid the same as our brothers and sisters who fly the same aircraft on comparable routes. And more than that, we're demanding to be recognized as a vital piece of this company's success. We are not just numbers that need to add up lower—we are professional pilots. And we will be treated as such in the fair contract we are trying to achieve, or we will strike."

As the clock continues to tick, pilots have cleared belongings from crew rooms, moved cars from company lots, and volunteered hours in the Fort Lauderdale Strike Center. This group of just more than 500 pilots is ready. They are ready for a deal—or a strike. It's now up to management to decide which scenario it will face at 12:01 a.m. on June 12. 🌐



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