

Hello? Is There Anybody Out There?



*Chris Beebe
MEC Chairman*

“As I’ve said for a long time, this type of consolidation is on its way. Do you think we should be on the leading edge or trailing edge of this phenomenon? Is your career more or less secure with this deal? Do you think we should continue to prepare our pilot group for 2003?”

I have recently heard lamentings as some of our pilots have watched the very public displays of the United MEC Chairman and have compared those actions to my own. Leadership manifests itself in different ways, sometimes because of who we are, sometimes because of the circumstances that are dealt to the individuals. Although our styles are different, be assured that your MEC and MEC Chairman are vigorously working to identify our needs and the successful strategies to make those needs reality. Trust your MEC leadership after watching our actions.

For example, the MEC is aware of and is working to secure the contractual provision contained in the Scope section of our Contract to make our futures more secure. US Airways has been remiss in its administration of our Contract regarding Scope with regard to the potential UAL transaction. The Merger Committee has corresponded with you to identify the specifics of these imperatives. You need to understand these issues and be prepared to both weigh in during the discussion and decision phase, as well as to back the actions of your MEC as we move through the process of securing and enforcing our Contract. We will fix these serious problems. A part of the fix will require your informed and considered participation, and your leadership.

One reason the United MEC talks to the press so often is because the United pilots are currently in Section 6 negotiations. In return for accepting ESOP in 1994 and giving up a significant percentage of their paychecks for five years, they expected to have more control over United’s operations. One might speculate that the pilots thought they were buying, through the ESOP, a greater voice in regard to their future and so are a bit disappointed (to say the least). In fact, some of their pilots have been reported to be upset because they feel that UAL is using the money it saved through the ESOP program to fund this proposed merger. Consequently, between negotiations and merger issues, United will likely be communicating in very public ways.

In the meantime, I’d like to know what you think. As I’ve said for a long time, this type of consolidation is on its way. Do you think we should be on the leading edge or trailing edge of this phenomenon? Is your career more or less secure with this deal? Do you think we should continue to prepare our pilot group for 2003? Send me your thoughts at 73634.2025@cs.com, or on the ALPA voice mail system: phone no. 703-689-4220, mailbox 5184.

By the way, if you feel somewhat ill equipped to answer these questions, you’re not alone. The Negotiating and Merger committees will

have an analysis available for presentation to the MEC at the next regular meeting beginning on September 18 in Philadelphia. And that's a great segue to the next topic: empty chairs.

Empty chairs

Lots of chairs are set up at the MEC meetings to hold all of the US Airways pilots who are interested seeing their union leaders in action. And at almost every meeting, those chairs are empty. At the last MEC special meeting in July, the Negotiating Committee made a fact-packed presentation for the MEC in open session. The number of pilots who saw it? Maybe five. Five out of over 5,200 dues-paying members. That's less than 0.001 percent! Come on, guys! It makes me think that many of you think that union involvement is sending in your dues—then ALPA sends you a couple of nice magazines and a few letters, just so you remember we're here.

The MEC meetings are announced on the Code-a-Phone and on the website. The quarterly meetings are publicized months in advance in the *US AIRWAVES*. We make every attempt to hold them at hotels that are near, or even in, airports. Only when something really big is going on—like when management comes to talk to us so that we can tell them how unhappy we are—do we get any kind of turnout. If you only attend when you're angry enough to make the trip, you won't see what MEC meetings are all about. When the real decisions are made that will affect the pilot group—when resolutions are brought to the floor and are debated and passed or failed—hardly anyone is there to see it.

You may be thinking that MEC meetings are about as exciting as watching C-SPAN. But the decisions made at MEC meetings are the decisions that govern your career, your profession, your quality of life, your working conditions, your pay, your benefits, your job security . . . in other words, just about all the things we complain about but continue to treat like the weather. Every issue brought to the table affects you.

I know you're interested in what happens at these meetings. ALPA statistics show that the number of pilots using the Code-a-Phone spikes up after the meetings. But the Communications Committee can only summarize what happens at these meetings since there's only so much recording room on the Code-a-Phone system. If you want to know the specifics, it's better to be there yourself than to hear from

someone else in the crew room who heard it from another who heard it . . . you get the picture. I've had pilots call me up and tell me they were unhappy, or happy, about something that NEVER HAPPENED at an MEC meeting, because they heard this information second-hand.

I want to invite you to come and see how your dues money is spent. The next scheduled MEC meeting is set for September 18-22 in Philadelphia at the downtown Marriott Courtyard hotel. I already asked Phil Osterhus, the MEC Secretary-Treasurer, if he would spring for the cab fare from the airport to the meeting site. Since he almost had a coronary (it's about \$20 each way), the short answer was no. But, I'll make a deal with you. The PHL airport train will take you to 13th and Market (Market East Station). It's a \$5 train ride and a one-block walk from Market East. I'll reimburse you for the train ride and, if the MEC has a working lunch, provide you with lunch.

I'd like to hear your feedback on this issue, also. Why don't more pilots show up at MEC meetings? I know everyone is busy. But what, specifically, is the problem? Do you think that they're a waste of time for you to attend? Or do you think that your presence there doesn't make a difference? Your responses will help me determine what should be changed.

Age 60

Here's a topic that I think you will be hearing more about in the future. As the number of pilots continues to dwindle and the airlines demand more and more pilots, I predict you will see some attempt to change the current age 60 rule shortly. If it does not come from Congress, or the FAA, it will come from the ATA (Air Transport Association). Think about it. A pilot shortage has been predicted ever since I began flying. It never happens. And why not? Because when the pool of applicants shrinks, the companies modify their interview requirements to expand the pool.

An agenda item being brought by another MEC to the September Executive Board calls for polling of the ALPA delegates (your LEC representatives) at the October Board of Directors meeting. The intent of their resolution is to form a committee to modify ALPA's current position on pilots flying beyond the age of 60, assuming a majority of the BOD members agree.

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Regardless of where you stand on this idea, you should know it will likely become a recurring theme. The current ALPA position, by the way, is to oppose any change to the existing rule. Be sure and let your representatives know how you feel so, if they are polled, they can respond in a way you want them to.

ALPA-PAC

It's an election year, guys. If you take a look at the issue of *Air Line Pilot* magazine that contains PAC information, you will find that our PAC (Political Action Committee) contributions are anemic compared to our brothers and sisters at the other ALPA carriers. Whether you like the idea of a PAC or not, it is the best way to be heard in the democratic society we live in. The best way to participate is through a check-off program that automatically deducts

your contribution from your paycheck. I've sent a package out, including a letter, check-off card and return envelope, that explains how easy it is to contribute. You can also contact the MEC office for a check-off cards.

Jim Gardner was recently appointed by the MEC to the Legislative Affairs Committee for the purpose of encouraging PAC participation. He'll be helping the MEC during this important election year and beyond.

That's my *US AIRWAVES* update for this month. The issues I talked about are varied, but each is important because it shows you what the hot topics are these days for your representatives and for all US Airways pilots. And don't forget my deal about attending the next MEC meeting in PHL. I hope to see many of you there.

