

# *Our Voice on Capitol Hill*

Northwest Airlines Master Executive Council Government Affairs Committee

Association of Flight Attendants – CWA, AFL-CIO

June 30, 2009

Dear Leaders and members:

This will serve as the second quarter report for the Government Affairs Committee. The past six months have brought us many victories that we should all be very proud of. The rapid movement we are seeing on Capitol Hill on our issues is unprecedented but not unexpected given the new attitude toward working families in the administration and the new Congress. Here is an overview of where we are so far.

## FMLA

The Family Medical Corrections Act (HR912) was introduced by Rep. Tim Bishop (D-NY) and Rep. Thaddeus McCotter (R-MI) passing the House once again with a resounding and overwhelming voice vote at the 111th Congress. Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) and other lawmakers will now introduce it in the Senate soon. It is our hope that the bill will pass the Senate this time and that we will not see a repeat of last session where the bill got stuck in the Senate. We should know the outcome of this bill before the summer recess in August. Once it passes the Senate it will then be combined with the House bill and sent to the President for his signature.

## NMB Appointment

Linda Puchala was confirmed by the Senate to replace Reed Van Der Water on the National Mediation Board (NMB) in May. The administration's nomination and the Senate's subsequent appointment was quick and unencumbered. This appointment, a third tier appointment usually takes up to six months after the new administration gets into office. As a result of our efforts on the Hill and the AFA-CWA's access to lawmakers in Washington we were able to get this appointment confirmed in record time. Now that Puchala is a member of the NMB, we can look forward to fair oversight of the collective bargaining and representation efforts under the Railway Labor Act. We at NWA know more than anyone how an unfair and unfriendly NMB can thwart our efforts to negotiate on a level playing field with management. This appointment is crucial at a time when many airline employees are engaged in contract negotiations, as well as our representational election.

## Minnesota Unemployment

For the past two years we have been meeting with lawmakers in both the state of Minnesota as well as the MN Congressional delegation to try and change a statute in the state law that prohibited our SLIP leave participants based in MSP to receive unemployment benefits. Last month our efforts were rewarded when Governor Pawlenty signed into law the Minnesota Omnibus budget bill that included our change in the state statute. The new statute as written:

### Sec. 10. [268.088] BENEFITS PAID DURING CERTAIN VOLUNTARY UNEMPLOYMENT.

(a) An applicant who elects to become temporarily unemployed in order to avoid the layoff of another employee with the applicant's employer due to lack of work is not ineligible for benefits under the leave of absence provisions of section 268.085, subdivision 13a, nor ineligible under the quit provisions of section 268.095, if:

- (1) the election is authorized under a collective bargaining agreement or written employer policy;
- (2) the employer has accepted the applicant's election;
- (3) the employer provides a written certification that is provided to the department that the applicant's election prevented another employee with the employer from being laid off due to lack of work; and
- (4) both the applicant and the employer, at the time of the election, expect the applicant's unemployment from the employer to be temporary.

(b) In addition to the requirements of paragraph (a), for unemployment benefits to be payable, an applicant must meet all the other benefit eligibility requirements under this chapter, including being available for suitable employment with a different employer.

## FAA Reauthorization Bill

The FAA Reauth. Bill passed the House and will now go to the Senate for their vote. The AFA-CWA was successful in including several flight attendant specific provisions that will have a positive effect on our work lives as follows:

### Section 306 – Flight Crew Fatigue

This language requires the FAA to act on the recommendations from the limited, initial research into flight attendant fatigue by the Civil Aerospace Medical Institute (CAMI) and outlined in their report to Congress. It requires that six specific fields of study be completed by June 30, 2010.

### Section 307 – Occupational Safety and Health Standards for Flight Attendants

This provision requires that the FAA develop and enforce regulations, in consultation with OSHA, to protect the health and safety of flight attendants working onboard the aircraft. The FAA is directed to have completed rulemaking on seven specific areas within three years.

### Section 401 – Smoking Prohibition

This section would ban smoking on charter flights that require a flight attendant working onboard.

### Chapter 423, Section 42303 – Pesticide application onboard aircraft

This section requires that passengers purchasing tickets on flights to countries that require the application of pesticides in the aircraft cabin be notified of the pesticide application requirement.

### Section 425 – Cell Phone Ban

This section would ban the use of cell phones or other communication devices, including computers, for voice communications on a flight in operation.

### Section 513 – Cabin Air Quality Technology

This section directs the FAA to begin research and development work on technology that will be able to detect highly toxic contaminants in the air supply and to filter out the contaminants. The work is to begin in 180 days and be completed in no later than three years.

### Section 801 – Air Carrier Citizenship

This section further clarifies that a U.S. air carrier must be under the actual control of US citizens.

### Section 812 – HIMS Program

This section directs the FAA to develop a HIMS program (drug and alcohol awareness and rehabilitation program) that covers both flight attendants and pilots.

### Section 819 – Temperature Standards

This section directs the FAA to conduct a study of onboard temperature and humidity levels to determine if temperature standards are necessary to protect airline crew and passengers from excessive heat and humidity onboard the aircraft.

## Crew Pass

Crew Pass is the ability for flight crews to bi-pass the TSA passenger security lines and have their own dedicated security line consisting of biometric technology that would identify the crewmember. The testing of this procedure began with pilots and is in its final stages. This is a voluntary program, not only for the airline, but for the individual crewmember as well. The cost of the program is estimated to cost \$10 a month. At present we are contacting the airline to request crew information for the purpose of identifying the crewmember and expanding the testing to flight attendants. The Government Affairs committee is working closely with the ASHS committee on this effort and we will keep you informed of developments.

## FlightPAC

FlightPAC is the best way to make your voice heard in Washington. It is the most important tool that AFA has to help elect Senators and Representatives who understand and defend the issues important to flight attendants. It provides AFA with access to Members of Congress that in turn allows AFA Government Affairs to make our case for the issues that affect flight attendants. AFA's goal is the enactment of legislation on issues affecting our jobs and workplace so we are not forced to address them at the bargaining table with our employers. This allows us to focus bargaining on improvements in wages and benefits. FlightPAC is a critically important tool to get us to that goal.

Some members question these contributions and ask why they should contribute when they already pay dues. The answer is simple. It is against the law to use membership dues to contribute to political campaigns. However it is imperative that we contribute in order to maintain our voice on Capitol Hill. FlightPAC gives the AFA an open door on Capitol Hill and without our contributions and support of our friends that champion our issues, we would not be able to accomplish as much as we have on behalf of our members. We give to candidates who help flight attendants. We send questionnaires to candidates to get their views on flight attendant issues. In turn, we will support those who respond favorably, regardless of party affiliation. AFA understands that not all of our members have the same political/social beliefs. The fact remains that there are issues that affect all members. These include OSHA protections, certification, the right to collective bargaining, air quality and a host of other workplace related issues. AFA does not factor in the social views of any of our members or the candidates we choose to contribute to. Go to our web page at [www.nwaafa.org/committees/govaffairs](http://www.nwaafa.org/committees/govaffairs) and click on FlightPAC to learn how you can make a contribution.

It is our goal to increase our contributions to FlightPAC in 2009 by 100 percent. Thank you to all that currently contribute.

Respectfully,

Albert Garcia  
Government Affairs Chair  
NWA Master Executive Council