

# AirTrafficController

## NATCA-led battle ends in victory against plans to privatize controllers

**T**he end of the latest, loudest chapter in the ongoing war against the Bush Administration's efforts to privatize the air traffic control system came, ironically, in the dark, quiet, Friday evening hours of Nov. 21, with little fanfare.

But the Senate's quick approval of the contentious Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization bill - moments after receiving a signed, one-year privatization ban from FAA Administrator Marion Blakey - represented a victory for safety, a setback for the White House's ideological agenda and a high-vol-

ume statement from Congress that privatizing the world's safest, largest and best system is a misguided and highly unpopular idea.

"Air Control Privatization Is Held Off," was the headline The Associated Press placed atop its nationally-distributed story about the conclusion of the Congressional fight.

NATCA President John Carr joined the union's many Congressional allies in declaring victory and he found satisfaction, just days before the busy holiday travel season began, that "the American flying public can breathe a sigh of relief for now."

"Congress has declared that sell-

ing out air traffic control to the lowest bidder will not be tolerated," Carr stated. "From day one, this has been about safety and safety has finally won. Now, it's up to everyone concerned about the safety of our skies to make sure that the administration stick to its promise not to privatize."

NATCA Executive Vice President Ruth Marlin, commenting on the union's year-long campaign to draw attention to the issue, educate the public and members of Congress and create as much media interest as possible, said the end result was a defiant rebuke of the administration's

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## Fire at the gates: California blazes threatened Southern California TRACON

*Mel Davis*  
*Southern Calif. TRACON Facility Representative*

### How it Began

On early Sunday morning, Oct. 26, a disoriented hunter in the Ramona, Calif., area lit a flare to signal his location, unintentionally igniting a wildfire that quickly threatened most of San Diego County. The morning's dry and strong winds blew the fires southwest toward downtown San Diego. Directly along that path, 30 miles away, lies Southern California TRACON (SCT).

Noticing the smoke and flames from the approaching fire around 7:30 a.m., SCT Area Representative Doug Voelpel called me to discuss the situation and various options. I decided to go to SCT and offer any possible help while Voelpel quickly contacted on-site SCT Support Manager Doug Marek. The pair decided the facility was in imminent danger and began trying to find out if help was available.

By 8:30 a.m., the fire was within two miles of SCT. SCT staff transitioned to generator power,

*Literally on the edge of destruction, Southern California TRACON overlooks the smoldering ground at its doorstep. Photo courtesy Mel Davis*



turned on all the landscape sprinkler systems, and began evacuating non-essential personnel.

### Evacuating the Facility

As the fire rapidly closed in on my own home, I decided to evacuate my wife and two children to a safer area, so I held off going to SCT.

By 9 a.m., the fire was within one mile of the TRACON. At this point, Air Traffic Division Manager John Clancy, Air Traffic Manager Linda O'Brien, and

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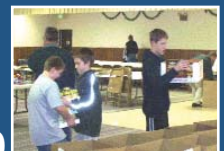
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# Presidential Perspective

*The Associated Press; June 12, 2003:*

*"The Senate defied the Bush administration on Thursday by voting to prohibit the government from transferring air traffic control to private companies."*

*The Associated Press; Nov. 24, 2003:*

*"The Bush administration agreed to shield all air traffic control jobs from privatization for a year to get Congress to approve a \$60 billion aviation spending bill that was stalled over the issue."*

These two lead paragraphs on the AP wire serve as remarkable, triumphant bookends on this incredible union's courageous, determined and hard-fought effort during the recent battle in the long war against privatization.

But between the opening and closing chapters of the struggle to achieve victory on Capitol Hill, a colossal confrontation between ourselves and our many Congressional friends and allies who put safety above all else and a White House hell-bent on shoving through its privatize-at-all-costs agenda took place.

I am extremely proud to report to you that victory was the reward for our toils, our dedication and our sacrifice these past few months to protect the safety of the system we hold so dear. But more battles are ahead and we must not let down our guard or give up one inch of the turf we have claimed. However, my immense gratitude to everyone in this union who contributed their time, their sweat, their work and their PAC money to the fight inspires me to report all the great things we accom-

plished along the road to protecting our system from profit-driven ideologues.

Our many years of working to protect the safety of the flying public instilled such confidence in the safety of the system that more than 70 percent of the public believes privatization is a bad idea.

We worked to build an overwhelming, bipartisan coalition on Capitol Hill to support language that would permanently ban privatization.

When the White House pushed through its own bill language opening up 69 of our towers to privatization, NATCA swung into action, putting together an aggressive plan of attack when the rest of Washington, D.C., had left for its annual August vacation.

We launched an advertising campaign and worked to create awareness of the issue in the home districts of key members of Congress. We held news conferences in over 25 locations, with NATCA members carrying an impassioned message of safety to large groups of newspaper reporters, radio microphones and television cameras in airports from Van Nuys, Calif., to St. Louis to suburban Chicago to Orlando to Dallas to Providence to Manchester, N.H.

When the president took Air Force One to one of the airports he wanted to privatize, we told the White House press corps and the local media.

We wrote opinion/editorial columns for several major newspapers and also for local newspapers where the administrator

was trying to pull the wool over unsuspecting eyes.

We drew media attention so widespread, so dramatic, so overwhelming, that the stack of press clips on my desk towers over four inches high and numbers several hundred pages.

We worked to build support in the House to reject the offending conference report. The failure on the part of leaders to get the bill through resulted in the very rare step of having to recommit the report back to the committee.

Our campaign was so effective, it forced our opponents on Capitol Hill to resort to the dirtiest of political games to try and win, including trading towers on the privatization hit list for votes from members in Republican districts. The ploy failed miserably.

One of our opponents was so upset at losing the battle to us that he threatened to hold hearings to explore militarizing the entire ATC system and demolishing our union. The press laughed at him. His own colleagues distanced themselves from his tirade.

We held numerous conference calls with aviation trade reporters in Washington and also with local reporters in key senatorial districts. We were joined by members of Congress and third-party allies, including consumer groups.

NATCA members wrote numerous letters to the editor for their local papers.

I fought for our position in front of the editorial boards of some large newspapers, including *USA Today* and the *Cleveland*

*Plain-Dealer.*

Ruth Marlin took on the FAA administrator directly in a live national TV interview aired by C-SPAN.

Overall, our campaign to inform the public and Congress of the administration's true intentions was so effective, the administrator's oft-stated, "no intention to privatize" statements rang hollow.

We forced the White House to admit something it never wanted to: it will not privatize, at least for one year. It took the administrator putting those words on paper to convince the Senate to pass the critical FAA reauthorization bill.

We bloodied noses. We carried the banner for the AFL-CIO. A huge crater lies where our anonymity used to be. The president's hometown newspaper, the *Austin American-Statesman*, wrote that, "It was a classic eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation that ended when the administration blinked."

The administration blinked. That is something that we can all take pride in after displaying our unwavering, unflinching, unbelievably strong support for the safety of our National Airspace System. I thank you all for rising to this latest challenge and making this one of our finest hours. I ask for your continued vigilance and support as we head into an election year that holds great opportunities for lasting victories.

***"We forced the White House to admit something it never wanted to: it will not privatize, at least for one year."***



**T**his end of year issue of *Air Traffic Controller* gives us the perfect opportunity to look back on the last 12 months. But this has not been just any year. This was the year we faced our biggest threat head on. Ideologues advocating the privatization of ATC came out of the shadows. The issue went from secret backroom meetings to the front door of the White House. 2003 brought us the first full year with a new Federal Aviation Administration administrator and may well define the next four years for our professions.

When Administrator Blakey took office, she was the most fortunate person in government. She inherited an air traffic control system that is the envy of the world. She inherited a workforce dedicated to the jobs they do and anxious to build on the FAA's successes of the previous five years. Traffic was well on the rebound from the Sept. 11 tragedy. The brief respite from delays provided the FAA with its greatest opportunity to build the needed capacity - to move swiftly from behind the curve to in front of it. NATCA was eager to assist the FAA in capitalizing on this rare opportunity. We hoped we would all be able to focus on a shared goal of promoting, protecting, and enhancing our National Airspace System.

That was a year ago. What a difference a year makes. It became very clear in the privatization debates throughout the

summer and fall that the once-shared goal of promoting, protecting, and enhancing our NAS is solely NATCA's goal. The Administration held up a four-year, \$60 billion reauthorization bill, jealously guarding its ability to dismantle the NAS one function or facility at a time. At the same time, each press statement from the FAA appeared as though it were designed to discredit the work of agency employees and undermine public confidence in our system.

The strategy was not new. Since it couldn't privatize us outright, it would do it one facility at a time. The political battle over the FAA reauthorization bill did far more for us than gain a simple year-long moratorium on contracting. It gave us the opportunity we needed to bring the issue to the forefront, exposing the real motivations behind the privatization agenda. A year ago, no one outside NATCA was worried about privatization. Now, they understand the steps the administration has taken and what they could mean for the future of our nation's infrastructure, aviation safety and economic growth. The threat is known. Not because NATCA says it is so, but because the lawmakers and the industry have experienced the lengths to which the administration will go to protect its ability to dismantle the system.

In addition to squandering time and resources to fight NATCA on a privatization ban, the FAA also frittered away the opportunity to prepare for the demand we all know is coming. On nearly every issue, agency negotiators have decided that protecting their position is more important than meeting the needs of the traveling public. Managers at every level have been stripped of their authority to resolve even the most trivial issue. Even a non-controversial,

common-sense proposal to hire additional controllers to prepare for the coming wave of retirements was stripped from the House Transportation Appropriations bill based upon the administrator's testimony. In recent public statements, the FAA has recognized the validity of the impending retirement crisis. Unfortunately, this recognition has come too late to take advantage of the staffing increases offered by Congress earlier this year.

On the technology front, a dramatic shift in philosophy has occurred. In the preceding five years, we had become accustomed to measuring the success of new technologies and procedures based on cost-savings delivered to the users. From the Dallas Metroplex plan to User Request Evaluation Tool (URET) to National Airspace Redesign (NAR), we have put our collective energies toward making the system more efficient for our customers. Now is it clear that the standard of measure is cost cutting for the FAA rather than enhancements in safety and system efficiency.

Internally, the agency continues to drive labor-management relationships to all time lows. Earlier this year, Blakey decided ongoing negotiations with four unions have been going on for "too long." She introduced a new anti-bargaining philosophy by announcing that if the parties could not agree on a contract, she would forward her proposal to Congress, along with union objections, where her proposal would become the collective bargaining agreement for that union in 60 days if Congress did not intervene. This intimidation approach has not been confined to the headquarters level. From baseless sick leave letters to refusals to bargain, agency management has clearly embraced a new philoso-

phy over the past year.

The fundamental tenets of our relationship with the FAA have changed. Just one year ago, the parties enjoyed a set of unified goals when engaging Capitol Hill, the media, and the aviation community. Labor peace reigned, errors dropped, morale soared and collaboration made problem-solving a snap. Technology advances flourished with NATCA's expert collaboration.

But in the face of adversity, NATCA has risen to meet the challenges of the past year. NATCA's image and influence in DC is at an all-time high. In the last year, we have added a few hundred new members to the union, and a few hundred thousand new dollars in additional contributions to our Political Action Committee (PAC). As always, the challenges ahead present unique opportunities for our professions. We started the year with the first-ever classification of ATC as commercial and we ended the year with a moratorium on contracting. At the headquarters level, the FAA has embarked on a radical reorganization and it is clear that no one has a taste for a repeat of the privatization battle.

There is one thing about the FAA's new approach of which I am certain. It is temporary. Too much talent is in our ranks for the FAA to forego the successes we are known to deliver. The road ahead will likely be full of challenges, but as always, NATCA will seize every opportunity. The talent and dedication of our members, activists, and officers will continue to move us forward. Hopefully the administration will move past its short-sighted ideologies and once again join us in protecting, promoting, and enhancing the NAS.

agenda.

"NATCA members should be very proud that they have been able to pull back the covers on the FAA's dirty little contract secret and expose this privatization agenda to the bright light of day," Marlin stated. "Despite the efforts of the administrator to divide and conquer the union, NATCA members stood together to prevent the dismantling of our profession."

NATCA's leading Senate advocate on the privatization issue, Sen. Frank Lautenberg, D-N.J., whose courageous stand included an effective filibuster threat that easily withstood a Republican challenge and forced the decisive agreement, made a forceful victory declaration and vowed to fight another day.

"The White House plan to privatize the air traffic control system has been stopped dead in its tracks," Lautenberg said in a press release. On the Senate

floor, he declared, "The fight is not over, and I'll continue to push for a permanent prohibition. I'll keep fighting until it goes away for good."

Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., who spoke out against privatization in a rousing Senate floor speech Sept. 30, told reporters the legislation "is not perfect, but it goes a long way toward" protecting FAA employees. Senate Aviation Subcommittee ranking member Jay Rockefeller, D-W.Va., said the agreement "does not mean that this debate is over," and that the Commerce Committee "will be closely monitoring the administration's actions in this area."

The one-year privatization moratorium capped a lengthy list of notable triumphs during NATCA's year-long battle:

In June, the Senate voted 56-41 - including 11 Republicans - to adopt Lautenberg's amendment to ban privatization. The

**"A Republican-controlled Congress told the White House that privatization is unacceptable and something needed to be worked out."**

**-John Carr**

subsequent FAA bill passed 94-0. The House version of the ban passed 418-8 as part of its FAA bill.

After the ban was destroyed by a White House veto threat in July, NATCA members went to work in August to defeat replacement legislation that would have allowed immediate privatization at 69 towers and system-wide privatization beginning in 2007. The union used local press conferences, national press briefings by Carr, advertising campaigns and a monstrous grass roots campaign to bring a torrent of anti-privatization materials and phone calls raining down on Capitol Hill.

"Tens of thousands of people

called their members of Congress," Carr said. "As a result of this public outcry, the House took the extraordinary step of recommitting a conference report and the Senate failed to get the votes it needed to move it forward. A Republican-controlled Congress told the White House that privatization is unacceptable and something needed to be worked out."

In the end, the White House was forced to put in writing something it never wanted to do: say it wouldn't privatize.

"Now, we need to work together to make sure that promises made are promises kept," Carr commented. "We'll be watching. And we'll be back."

## NATCA involvement results in victory for safety at expanded Miami Airport

NATCA has advocated runway expansion as a way to help alleviate system congestion. But, as evidenced at Miami International Airport, how new runways are numbered is crucial to ensuring that added capacity does not come with major new safety problems.

However, the Miami situation appears to have a safe and happy ending after a series of high-level negotiations sparked by the vocal concerns of Miami Tower (MIA) controllers.

MIA's new runway, which opened on Sept. 4, runs parallel to the main east-west runway and is only 800 feet to the north. Currently, the new runway is designated as Runway 8 and the main runway has kept its designation as Runway 9-left. The east-west runway on the far south side of the airport remains called 9-right.

The problem, as first noticed by Miami controllers, is that pilots approaching from the west can, and have, easily confused the new runway as 9-left since it sits at the far left side of their field of vision. The main runway, because it runs so close to the new one, looks like 9-right from the air. Pilots were often lining up to land on the wrong runway, sometimes two or three times a day.

But controllers fought to have the designations changed. The closely-spaced parallels should be called 8-left and 8-right, they argued, while the third parallel on the south side of the airport should be designated 9. An initial meeting with Federal Aviation Administration officials in Atlanta in October produced the same conclusion, with NATCA joined in agreement by the Air Line Pilots Association,

Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, Air Transport Association, American Airlines and others.

A second meeting, in Washington, D.C., in November, upheld the recommendation and FAA officials are expected to grant final approval to the renumbering plan as early as January.

"I feel vindicated," said Miami Tower Controller and NATCA Area Representative Jim Marinitti, who spearheaded MIA's campaign to have the runway designations changed. "I pushed and my local pushed and we got the support of the entire aviation community. It was more important to do this right for the long term instead of seeking a quick fix."

Marinitti said NATCA raised its



*A renumbering plan for parallel runways at Miami Tower should help eliminate confusion.*

concerns about the runway designations two years ago, even before the concrete was poured and the painted runway numbers applied. But the FAA brushed those concerns aside, according to Marinitti.

"Early on, a lot of people said it was too late to fix this, even though myself and NATCA were making the right points. They said we would have to adjust," Marinitti remarked. "Now, looking back on it, I'm glad I didn't sit and try to get by with what we had."

## ***From the cover: SCT narrowly averts disaster as fire burns facility's edge***

the remaining employees at SCT decided to establish "ATC Zero" and evacuate all personnel.

Los Angeles Center (ZLA) then assumed responsibility for all airspace in the Southern California Metropolitan Area.

The ZLA controllers had to provide "vectors to final" to hundreds of aircraft at multiple airports with zero warning and no time for a "do-over," yet those professional men and women passed the test with flying colors.

Because the military police and firefighters from MCAS Miramar - the Marine base co-located on grounds with SCT - protected the facility, the bulk of the employees could exit the area safely.

However, four managers and two NATCA members chose to remain at SCT to ensure the transition to ATC Zero went as smoothly as possible.

### **Fire at the Gate**

By approximately 9:30 a.m., SCT's future looked grim: the fire had already burned the perimeter fence and shrubbery at the facility. At one point, the smoke inside the control room hung below the tethered lights 10 feet from the ceiling. The administrative wing was completely filled with smoke and you could not see cars 15 feet away in the parking lot.

Without the heroic efforts of the marine and city firefighters, the SCT structure likely would have fallen victim to the fires.

At approximately 11:30 a.m, TRACON controller assets dispersed to the five Southern California TRACON major air carrier airports - Burbank, Los Angeles, Ontario, Orange County/John Wayne, and San Diego - to perform Terminal Radar Approach and Tower Cab (TRACab) functions.

Two certified professional controllers (CPCs) and one area supervisor from each area of specialization worked each shift (swing/day/mid) at each tower.

Upon arrival, each host tower unanimously accepted its new occupants with grace and style, displaying unparalleled esprit-de-corps.

The dispersal relieved Los Angeles Center and enhanced its system capacity. Only a highly trained, self-motivated group of individuals acting cohesively as a team could accomplish such a complex operation.

On Monday morning, Oct. 27, SCT remained at ATC Zero. Our CPCs pulled eight straight hours on TRACab position and loved every minute of it.

Meanwhile, the National Airspace System (NAS) limped along and the pressure to reopen the facility was intense, although safety was still a major issue.

Air quality samples taken of the control room air were shipped to offsite labs for testing; however, major fires still burned near the facility, causing concern for flare-ups around the facility as well as poor air quality.

The results of the tests were not in and the local authorities mandated that residents stay off the roadways to allow for emergency vehicle traffic.

Fortunately, logic prevailed and we continued TRACab operations throughout the day.

### **SCT Reopens**

On Tuesday morning, Oct. 28, at 4 a.m., SCT resumed limited operations. At 6 a.m., the full day shift controllers reported for duty facing pungent odors and the taste of smoke in their throats.

Due to the widespread nature of the fire hazard, SCT employees still had homes and families threatened with loss. But the traffic projection was at 85 percent of "normal," so off we went.

The transition from TRACab to TRACON operations went smoothly as everyone focused solely on accomplishing the mission of separating air traffic.

At noon, the sky outside was so black the lights in my car automatically turned on in nighttime mode as I retrieved food for the shift.

At 4 p.m., I decided to leave the facility for the homes of friends and family, wondering what the next day would bring. All the while, my coworkers moved thousands of flights with hundreds of thousands of people



*Military firefighters from MCAS Miramar try to stop fires surrounding Miramar, the U.S. Marine base co-located on grounds with Southern California TRACON. Photo courtesy MCAS Miramar Fire Department*



*Propelled by dry winds, the destructive fires burned everything in their path. Photo courtesy MCAS Miramar Fire Department*

*The blazes left a trail of destruction while advancing to SCT. Photo courtesy Mel Davis*



in and out of the airspace over Southern California.

As I write this Wednesday evening, my clothes smell like smoke, my head aches and my throat itches from the environment that has clear air but major smoke damage. Several of our coworkers' homes are still in danger.

### **EDITOR'S NOTE**

In the days following SCT's brush with destruction, things quieted down considerably. Controllers and staff resumed their jobs working traffic as the flames retreated.

## Union members with pilot licenses enjoy two rewarding aviation careers

**I** had the bug. I loved the smells, the shapes—everything about airplanes,” Fort Wayne Facility Representative Mark Wittmayer reflected. Aviation has always been in his blood.

Like a number of NATCA members, Wittmayer is also a licensed pilot. Flying adds the pilot's unique perspective to the controller's understanding of aviation, Wittmayer observed. As a pilot and the co-owner of a small aircraft, Air Traffic Systems Requirement System (ARS) Liaison Dale Wright remarked, “It gives me a broader view of the aviation industry. You see more of the system. Flying broadens your perspective.” In short, flying controllers see the best of both worlds within the field.

### “The Bug”

Many controllers who decided to climb into the cockpit grew up in a world surrounded by aircraft. And they realized early on they had a deep passion for everything aeronautic. “My father was a pilot and I've been interested in aviation as long as I can remember,” Wittmayer remarked. From an early age, his father took him on long flights, and even let his young son fly on occasion.

Southern California TRACON Controller Bruce Morey described his passion for aircraft as life-long and visceral. “I just always wanted to fly. My dad had been a pilot and controller, and I can recall hearing stories of his flight.” Morey was hooked. “It's something that just gets in your blood.”

Northern California TRACON Controller Chuck Wahl began flying at age 14. “I soloed for the

first time on my 16th birthday, and became a flight instructor senior year of high school,” he remarked.

Riverside Airport Facility Representative Bronson Barth reminisced that he'd always wanted to be a pilot. And while enrolling in an ATC training program was “the better thing to do in the long run,” Barth could not fight the urge to climb into the cockpit.

### The Perfect Hobby

Many aspiring pilots turned to controlling as a worthwhile career within the field they love, but they couldn't let go of the urge to fly. Piloting as a hobby offered the perfect solution—and is an ideal complement to their profes-

sions. “I guess I tend to be more sympathetic toward pilots,” Morey said. He worked as a U.S. Air Force controller and learned to fly from one of his classmates during

training. He received certification as a commercial pilot in 1999 and, in his spare time, moonlights as an instructor at the Grey Eagle Flight Academy in Carlsbad, Calif.

Camarillo Tower Facility Representative Tony Williams left the cockpit for the headset, becoming a controller after years of work as a pilot. For him, flying is more than just a hobby. Williams' commute to work from his home in San Diego is about 180 miles - a trying drive that can easily consume upward of six hours' time in heavy traffic. Commuting by air actually is his best travel option, because flying to work cuts his travel time down to about 35 minutes.

*“It gives me a broader view of the aviation industry. You see more of the system. Flying broadens your perspective”  
-Dale Wright*

Camarillo Tower Facility Representative Tony Williams and his son A.J. pose at Oshkosh's air show. Williams has flown to the annual event 10 times. Photo courtesy Tony Williams



Northern California TRACON Controller Chuck Wahl stands next to the cockpit of the T28 Trojan he rebuilt. Wahl spent 10,000 man hours on the project. Photo courtesy Chuck Wahl



### A New Perspective

Some controllers feel flying provides them a more comprehensive view of the field as a whole, and impacts how they do their jobs every day.

“Knowing what it's like sitting on the other side of the mike is helpful,” Wittmayer said.

Although he believes controllers have to be careful and “stay out of the cockpit,” understanding how things work in the aircraft helps controllers “avoid distractions for the pilot.”

Also, controllers who are pilots can better relate to spe-

cific problems pilots face and the atmosphere in the cockpit, Wittmayer observed. “You have a better awareness of what the pilot is doing,” Williams remarked.

“I tend to be more proactive than procedural” with pilots, providing them with clear instructions, Wahl commented.

Most important, however, is the greater understanding of the industry flying provides.

“I feel extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to participate in two very interesting and rewarding aviation occupations,” Morey reflected.

# California Congresswoman forms Labor Caucus for working families



**Rep. Linda Sánchez, D-Calif.**

The plight of the American worker is near and dear to my heart, and now, as a newly-elected member of Congress, I feel fortunate that I am in a position to help make a difference and improve the lives of working families.

My passion and dedication for the interests of America's working families came from an unlikely source: grapes. As a child, my siblings and I were not allowed to eat grapes. The reason, my mother explained, was because immigrant laborers in the Central Valley of California were mistreated, exploited and earning a pittance for back-breaking work.

Over the dinner table, my parents would talk about Caesar Chavez and his efforts to organize farm workers. Chavez fought to ensure a fair wage, health care and better conditions for every worker.

These experiences were instrumental in shaping my commitment to public service, particularly my interest in protecting working families.

I know first hand that many workers are

not treated with dignity and respect. I have walked picket lines, mobilized farm workers, organized janitors, and helped employees keep their health care and pensions. I am a proud card-holding member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 441 and the former Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the Orange County Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO.

When I came to the U.S. House of Representatives in January, I was asked to sign up for Congressional Caucuses. I joined the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, the Human Rights Caucus and the Women's Caucus, among others. You can imagine my surprise to learn that while there is a Congressional Ski and Snowboard Caucus and a House Potato Caucus - there was no caucus to give a unified voice to working men and women.

I was shocked, and I wanted to do something to ensure that the voices of working families are loudly heard in Congress - each and every day.

To this end, I joined forces with two other members of Congress: Rep. Stephen Lynch, D-Mass. and Rep. Michael Michaud, D-Maine. Together, we formed the "Congressional Labor and Working Families Caucus" because we share a passion for protecting working families.

The aim of the Working Families Caucus is to protect workers' rights and American families by developing and implementing a pro-labor agenda in the U.S. Congress. The caucus will help advance critical issues facing working families like the systematic attack on the right to collectively bargain. The caucus will work on issues like overtime pay and safer working conditions, and is a united front against anti-labor and anti-worker legislation on trade policy, pension rules, and health care.

We have already partially succeeded in blocking President Bush's proposal to eliminate overtime pay for firefighters, nurses and police officers, as well as up to 8 million other workers across this country. Members of the House and Senate voted

against this provision, sending a strong message to the Republican leadership that this is the wrong course of action.

For many men and women, overtime pay is not spare change. It helps families pay the mortgage, pay for college, and save for retirement. That's why the caucus will continue to working to defeat the President's proposal.

This is just the beginning for the caucus. For example, workers are not only entitled to overtime pay, but they need and deserve an increase in the minimum wage. The current minimum wage is \$5.15 - barely enough to make ends meet.

When President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the first minimum wage legislation in 1938, he said its purpose was to provide "a fair day's pay for a fair day's work."

Since 1968, the value of the minimum wage has declined dramatically - almost 40 percent. If the minimum wage is not increased by 2004, it will be the second longest time period in our history workers have gone without an adjustment. To me, that is not a fair day's pay.

If the president and the Republican Congressional Leadership really want to jump start the economy, they should start by increasing the minimum wage for the approximately 10 million workers who rightly deserve it, instead of giving tax breaks to the wealthiest 1 percent of all Americans.

It is time for Congress to put value on hard work and the workers who are the backbone of our great country. That is exactly why I co-founded the Labor Caucus. I want to give the millions of working families across America a voice in Congress. Brothers and sisters, I proudly stand in solidarity with you.

For more information on the caucus, upcoming activities, or to share your thoughts and ideas, please contact my office at 202/225-6676 or visit our labor web site at:  
<http://www.house.gov/lindasanchez/labor-caucus>.

## CORRECTIONS

In the story "NATCA lobbies Congress for FAA bill prohibiting contract tower expansion" in the September/October issue of this publication, the quote attributed to Rep. Vernon Ehlers, R-Mich, should have been attributed to Bill Pascrell, D-N.J. Also, critical understaffing and hazardous working conditions occurred at the Northwest Mountain contract tower where Jeremy Yahn worked previously, not Boise Tower, the FAA tower where he currently works.

## A damaging fire causes relocation of Western Pacific Regional Office

Nov. 3 started out like any other day for Western Pacific Region Administrative Assistant Terri Lane. However, once she arrived at the regional office in San Marcos, Calif. for work, things changed drastically.

"I showed up Monday morning, and the windows were blown out," Lane explained. The regional office fell victim to a fire - but, ironically, had survived the devastating wildfires plaguing the rest of San Diego County. A careless smoker in another office complex within the building accidentally ignited this fire.

While the damage was substantial, the regional staff will reoccupy the office, Western Pacific Region Vice President Bob Marks remarked. However, this will not happen until mid-January at the earliest, and could take longer.

Much of the damage the office suffered came from both smoke and water damage. "The firefighters flooded our office to contain the fire," and destroyed all the furniture and much of the office equipment in the process, Lane observed.

Now, Lane uses the private office in her San Diego home as the region's temporary

headquarters, and Marks is working out of his home as well. But the transition is a difficult one. "We're kind of mobile right now," Lane explained, because of the confusion the office shutdown generated.

The staff has yet to determine if anything is salvageable, and remains on a lengthy insurance waitlist that includes numerous victims of the wildfires.

If union members need to contact the office, the phone and fax numbers remain the same. The region's temporary new address is: P.O. Box 26100, San Diego, CA 92196.

## Exclusive new benefit: free, personalized retirement counseling and analysis now available

**Lewis Zietz**  
Membership and Marketing Director

Not sure when you'll be eligible to retire or how much income you can expect when you do? Do you have questions about Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance (FEGLI) or whether you should switch to another insurance vehicle? Is disability insurance right for you? Ever wonder how the thrift savings plan works? Don't worry - help has arrived!

NATCA has contracted IDPM Group's Government Educational Services Division to provide personal retirement and federal benefit counseling to our members. IDPM has been at the forefront of providing federal employees with current and accurate benefits information.

NATCA members have asked for this service to better plan for their retirement and to take advantage of federal benefit offerings. This is particularly important because a great number of our members will be eligible for retirement within a few short years.

- IDPM reaches to our members across the United States, and can now assist in educating them on their benefits by providing extensive detailed information in the form of a customized, computer-generated retirement analysis.

This analysis also includes individual retirement counseling to any member who is interested.

- IDPM has assigned one individual to coordinate the program with NATCA, and it provides online assistance to those members

who prefer using e-mail with a link from the union's home page. This service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

In addition, they provide assistance via telephone for members preferring personal service through a toll-free number: 866/NATCA-34 (866/628-2234). Members can also call IDPM directly at 610/366-1556.

- A benefits specialist is now available in every region to accommodate NATCA members with personalized one-on-one service. The specialist will review the computerized analysis, answer questions, provide recommendations and establish a timeline to assist the members in obtaining their retirement goals.

- NATCA members are provided with updates of federal benefit manuals through a customized web site that will link to the NATCA home page: [www.idpmgroup.com](http://www.idpmgroup.com).

- Members can access tax professionals for advice on relevant federally-offered benefits. This service is available either by telephone e-mail at [NATCA@idpmgroup.com](mailto:NATCA@idpmgroup.com). Response time is within two working days.

- Finally, there are scheduled federal retirement seminars specifically geared toward answering member questions.

These eight-hour seminars are available nationwide, and members will know in advance the seminar schedule, date and time via the web site.

This exceptional benefit is available to our active and retired members only.

## Tee off in the 5th annual "NATCA in Paradise" charity golf tournament

**To benefit:** NATCA Charitable Foundation

**When:** Feb. 23, 2004

**Where:** East Lake Woodlands Country Club

**Format:** Four person scramble (captain's choice)

**Cost:** \$90 per person

This includes golf, prizes, refreshments, a boxed lunch and dinner.

*\$30 per person for dinner only.*

**Time:** Registration for the event begins at 8:30 a.m., and tee off begins at 10:30 a.m. Dinner and award ceremonies will start at 3:30 p.m.

*Soft spikes are required. There are many hotel accommodations in the area. If you need help finding a place to stay, please give us a call. This spectacular yearly event is limited to the first 144 golfers, so act quickly. If you have questions, please contact Tampa NATCA at 813/371-7724 or email Jim Jarvis at [tpajim@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:tpajim@tampabay.rr.com).*

Make your check payable to NATCA and mail it to:

Tampa NATCA  
P.O. Box 20141  
Tampa, FL 33622

## NATCA's enormously popular training seminars teach essential skills

**A**ir traffic controllers receive extensive training to work traffic in the nation's skies, but many NATCA members also have chosen to enrich their knowledge of union policy by enrolling in popular courses offered by NATCA's Training Department.

"Attendance of our courses has just exploded," remarked Greg Llafet, the union's director of training. "Attendance increased by 50 percent in 2003, and that can be attributed to the substantive and engaging material taught by the best instructors our union has to offer."

President John Carr explained that "NATCA training is one of the most important things we do as a union. Educating tomorrow's leaders today will pay dividends for all of us in the long run."

Members can choose from a number of courses including Facility Representative Training, Local Secretary-Treasurer Training, as well as an Advanced Representation and Arbitration Advocate Courses and Workshop. Throughout the year, members flock to the Golden Nugget Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, Nev., to learn the intricacies of functioning as secretary-treasurer or facility representative at a NATCA local.

### Secretary-Treasurer Training

Dallas/Fort Worth TRACON Facility Representative Mike Conely attended Secretary-Treasurer Training. He believes the increased scrutiny unions face makes it imperative for NATCA members to familiarize themselves with the complicated task of documenting financial transactions at the local level.

"This is an excellent course, and it is important for members to attend so they are educated on these matters," explained Conely. "We are constantly trying to fend off attacks from this administration, and union finances can be a vulnerable point if you don't take the time to learn proper procedures."

NATCA Executive Vice President Ruth Marlin agreed that the importance of these courses is magnified in a political climate where unions have become a frequent target.

"Things have changed dramatically with the Department of Labor, and the viewpoint is often that unions are guilty of wrongdoing until they are proven innocent," Marlin told those attending the course. "The treasurer has a vital role in protecting our union, and this course allows these individuals to learn how to perform their job in a manner that is beyond reproach."

Many participants praised the courses for their substantive information and applicability to their regular NATCA duties.

"I like it - it's very informative and I'm glad they have an organized schedule," said Cindy Bacon-Sturgis, the secretary/treasurer at Jefferson County Tower. "I thought the presentation would be dry, but I think it's interesting and very pertinent to what I do."

### Facility Representative Training

Facility Representative Training teaches NATCA members the complex details of representing a facility for the union. Material in this course is challenging, and participants must be dedicated so they can learn

*Students in the facility representative class review materials and discuss some information presented to them.*



to protect NATCA members in their facility from unfair treatment.

Marshall Baker, a facility representative at Baton Rouge/Ryan Field Tower, believes gaining a thorough understanding of NATCA's contract with the Federal Aviation Administration is the course's most valuable lesson.

"The instructors quite literally start from scratch, going over not so much what the contract says, but each provision's intent," Baker explained. "When a dispute arises, you and the FAA manager may have a different interpretation, but the deciding factor is the intent of the contract."

Others echoed Baker's statements about the course.

"The quality of information presented is impressive, and opened my eyes as to what a facility representative actually does," Charlotte Controller Ray Stanley said. "Going over the union's contract was also helpful, as this is truly what affects us every day."

## Los Angeles Tower achieves impressive "none in a million" designation

Los Angeles Tower - the fourth busiest facility in the United States - reached a milestone enviable among facilities its size: Oct. 7, LAX reported no controller errors in over a million operations.

Los Angeles Airport Facility Representative Mike Foote felt better staffing made a key difference. "Really since the strike in 1981 until around two years ago, LAX had been one-third understaffed, and we've finally started getting bodies in here,"

he observed.

The Federal Aviation Administration opened local assist positions at the tower, which was crucial to increasing staffing.

The "none in a million" distinction is a welcome change for an airport where errors once were all too common. Also - not coincidentally, according to Foote - Los Angeles Tower currently is operating at full staffing capacity for the first time "since as far back as any-

one can remember." While the FAA authorized the facility to staff 50 controllers, between 28 and 30 worked throughout much of the 1990s.

The opening of local assist positions at LAX in recent years has helped bring in desperately needed new controllers. Between 1998 and 2002, staffing increased by over 40 percent.

This accomplishment sets a benchmark for all major airports. "This is the milestone that sets the standard the American pub-

lic deserves," Foote remarked.

In addition to adequate staffing, controller skill and dedication helped ensure Los Angeles Tower reached this important distinction.

"We are the poster children for staffing for safety instead of profit. Since the FAA is not in business to make money, we can concentrate on the safe and expeditious issues the flying public demands, without concern for profits," Foote commented.

## Union members give back to the community throughout the year

**D**espite contending with stressful jobs separating aircraft, many NATCA members take time out of their busy schedules to help those who are less fortunate during the holiday season and throughout the year.

Mike Patterson, an air traffic controller at Evansville Tower, Ind., is an assistant scoutmaster with Boy Scout Troop 305 in Newburgh, Ind. He feels a strong sense of pride in give back those needing assistance in his community by joining the scouts.

The troop collects donations of food, toys for children and money from local businesses and area citizens as the new year approaches. Scouts then deliver the goods to area families to brighten their holiday seasons.

"Many of the kids in the troop are from more affluent families in the area, and often this is the first time many of them even realize there are such needy families in the vicinity," Patterson explained.

"Most of the families we help live in rundown apartments and have very worn clothing and little furniture."

The gratitude shown by those who are recipients of the community's generosity warms the

hearts of Patterson and members of his troop.

"As for the looks on the faces of the moms and dads when they realize someone is bringing them food and gifts to make their holiday a little brighter, you truly cannot measure the joy," Patterson said. "The children, who otherwise may get few if any gifts during the holidays, are equally overjoyed."

Controllers at Daytona Beach Tower in Florida make helping families during the holidays a facility-wide effort.

"At Daytona Beach Tower, the whole facility pitches in, and we helped out four families for Christmas last year," remarked Controller Katherine Clifton.

"We got these families everything from presents to new washers and dryers. It is really great to see all these controllers come together for people they don't even know."

But the generosity of NATCA members does not end with the holiday season. Many union members give their time freely throughout the year.

Natalie Moloney works at

*Volunteers with Mike Patterson's Boy Scout Troop 305 help sort items for needy families. Photos courtesy Mike Patterson*



Houston TRACON, and has been active in the Arthritis Foundation's "Joints in Motion" program for the past two years.

The foundation employs coaches who train volunteers to hike about 12 miles or run a marathon in exchange for helping to raise funds (usually through friends and family that sponsor your run).

"I originally got involved to challenge myself to run a



*Through volunteering for Patterson's troop, children from Newburgh, Ind. learn more about families in the area.*

marathon," explained Moloney.

"I've stayed involved because of my many relatives and good friends who suffer from various forms of arthritis, and I'm grateful to NATCA national, my facility and many individual NATCA members who have helped with my effort."

## NOTAMs help make controllers' jobs run smoothly and efficiently

From working to ensure U.S. airlines can safely land overseas to communicating with controllers and pilots in over 205 nations, "typical" is rarely a word one would associate with the daily grind of a notice to airman (NOTAM).

"It really does vary every day," NOTAM National Representative Phillip Vigil said. Among the smallest bargaining units within NATCA with just eight members, NOTAMs nonetheless contribute considerable expertise and professionalism to the union. All eight NOTAMs work at the Air Traffic Control Systems Command Center in Herndon, Va.

This elite cadre's primary responsibility is to manage the U.S. Mass Resource NOTAM Database, which includes information about flight safety around the world. These specialists rely on the database to provide important aeronautical and safety data to aircraft traveling all over the world. Recently, NOTAMs have assisted the U.S. military in handling Iraqi airspace.

"Most of what we do is regulatory," Vigil observed. The NOTAMs communicate with pilots and controllers regarding any issue that affects flight safety.

Each day offers something new. "What we

do all depends on the condition of things," Vigil remarked. After Hurricane Isabel slammed into Virginia and North Carolina Sept. 18, "we helped the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) with search and rescue operations." Their work with Global Positioning System (GPS) came in handy in looking for people lost in the chaos of the hurricane. NOTAMs also provide software that sets up specifics for the GPS controllers and pilots use.

NOTAMs provide the ATC system with important skills, helping ensure controllers can smoothly perform their jobs.

# NATCA's Region X establishes unique niche within union framework

**N**ATCA's tenth region - Region X - has come a long way since Federal Aviation

Administration engineers and architects first discussed forming a bargaining unit.

While the region took shape around the engineers and architects, it eventually grew to encompass the aircraft certification and airport division workers, the general council division, the drug abatement inspectors, logistic division works and the regional office staff specialists.

As this process took place, the embryonic region worked to establish its own administration and identity. "Other units started organizing with us, and we began struggling for a name," Assistant Region X Vice President James Withers said. Because their numbers had grown considerably, they began classifying themselves as a region. The name was then born, and took effect after the union's 2002 Convention in Cleveland, Ohio.

Recently, the young region

worked with the agency to establish promotion criteria for 100 engineers. Also, Region X plans to arbitrate for the interest of back pay for 300 engineers whose career level descriptions (CLDs) changed in December 2001. Their position changes did not take effect until February 2003, however. While the region won back pay for the engineers, Region X continues to battle the FAA for the interest it owes its members. "We're fighting over the interest of the back pay now," Region X Vice President Jim D'Agati explained.

While the region has accomplished much in its young history, it has experienced some growing pains organizationally. The facility representatives are not always the official representatives to the agency. Rather, only members of the specific bargaining units can negotiate with the FAA.

"Each bargaining unit has a designated representative to the agency to deal with representation issues," Withers explained. In the case of controllers, local presidents are also the facility

representatives to the FAA. "In most facilities, everything lines up, but not with us," Withers commented. "We have NATCA organizational reps, and then we have NATCA reps to the agency, and the two aren't always the same."

The region organizes primary representatives - dubbed national representatives - for each bargaining unit. The national rep is the focal point for bargaining unit issues not specifically contained in a single region and has been named the single point of contact for the agency.

"The facility representative typically is not recognized as NATCA's representative to the agency for any other bargaining unit in the local than the one the rep belongs to and cannot negotiate issues with the FAA," Withers noted.

NATCA has established FAA-designated reps in each region for each bargaining unit. Even though an FAA-designated rep can name someone outside a bargaining unit the official representative of that unit in writ-

ing, that presents its own series of problems. "Getting official time can be a hassle, because each bargaining unit contract with the FAA mandates official time for the established rep," Withers remarked.

Organization within the unit presents unique difficulties the other regions do not see. "It's like a three-ring circus at times, but we're up to the challenge," Withers observed.

Despite the problems delegating authority has posed, the region nonetheless has managed to develop its own unique niche within the NATCA organizational framework. Further, the camaraderie region members have developed is one of the region's major benefits. "We've gotten to know other people we wouldn't normally be in contact with," Withers commented. Information now flows better as well - because the bargaining units are more familiar with the agency as a whole, and bargaining units that previously had little contact now have a forum to exchange information easily.

## Union's web site offers numerous innovative new features to visitors

New features on NATCA's web site - [www.natca.org](http://www.natca.org) - allow members to quickly and easily access comprehensive issue briefs on NATCA's recent efforts to fight the White House's push toward privatization as well as the Federal Aviation Administration's Contract Tower Program. These are accessible from the homepage of NATCA's web site. Some highlights from each section follow.

**Privatization Section:** Contains the latest news, floor statements and news releases from various legislators, as well as union press releases. A recent report from EUROCONTROL emphasizing increased productivity and efficiency in U.S. air traffic control (compared to the largely privatized European system) is available, as well as many other features.

**FAA's Contract Tower Program:** Visit this section to learn the truth about the con-

tract tower program. Included are a letter from NATCA's leadership, a detailed fact sheet on contract towers, congressional testimony, a cost-analysis graph and more.

**NATCA Quizzes:** Want to test your knowledge of current NATCA issues? This new interactive section is your chance. Visitors can answer questions before being directed to a web page with further information.

**"One Hundred Years of Flight:"** This new interactive feature celebrates the 100th Anniversary of Flight with detailed accounts and colorful flash graphics.

**Communicating for Safety Flash Postcard:** This animated, flash postcard will spotlight NATCA's *Communicating for Safety* conference.

**Welcome Message from NATCA President John Carr:** In this video feature, Carr sepa-

rately welcomes the public and NATCA members to the union's web site.

**Flash Quizzes:** NATCA's quizzes, located on the site's homepage, will get a boost of energy with flash animation.

But NATCA is not stopping there. The union's web site is frequently updated to provide a valuable resource for members and the public alike. Sections on crucial issues such as privatization are kept up-to-date to provide the most informative content in a manner that is both timely and engaging. In addition, new features are always in the planning stages. Here is a sneak peak at a new item scheduled for the next several months.

**Photo Diaries:** Comprehensive photo diaries will provide new perspectives on key union issues.

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