



NATCA President Paul Rinaldi Speaks at Aero Club of Washington

January 29, 2019

- Paul Rinaldi: When we scheduled this, I was asked, "Well, what are you going to talk to the Aero Club about?" And I said, "I dunno, let's let current events dictate what we're gonna talk about." I mean, who knew? I mean, we had a five year FAA Reauthorization Bill that was passed October 1. Certainly nothing bad would happen, right? Maybe we see the value of FAA reauthorization without appropriations.
- Paul Rinaldi: Yes, a five year FAA Reauthorization Bill, the first one since 1982. And nobody really felt comfortable about it because we saw that the Defense Appropriations was passed and that aviation possibly could be the pointy end of the spear for another political tug of war here in Washington, D.C. You know, this shut down cut us deep. Cut government employees deep, cut our aviation industry deep, and it's, we're just starting to stitch it back up that cut, 35 days worth. And we're not sure what the damage really is, but it cut and everybody in this room should feel that pain. If you make your living in aviation, you should be, you should feel the pain in which our members felt for 35 days.
- Paul Rinaldi: You know, you don't prepare for something like this. You don't have a game plan while, uh, that you just dust off a book. But you meet every day, every minute of the day, you work around the clock and you start putting pieces together on how we're gonna get out of this-this mess. And we have our NATCA executive board here. They were newly elected on September 1 and it was baptism by fire. And they did an outstanding job, uh, around the country, giving the message, delivering that message, and making sure that the leadership in our facilities knew and our controllers knew. We must hold the system together. Our NATCA staff is here. I have never been more proud of our staff and, uh, the job that they did. And many of you in this room know how great my NATCA staff is because most of you tried to poach a bunch of them. And son of, some of you ... I was gonna say something else, but some of you have been, uh, pretty successful about taking some of them. So knock that off now too.
- Paul Rinaldi: You know, um, our system was running full steam ahead on December 21st. Uh, it was a freight train. We had a lot of moving parts, we were growing, we were modernizing, we were working for the new entrance, uh, in certifying and working towards making our National Airspace System the best it could possibly be. That freight train came to a complete stop except for the actual running of air traffic control. We've lost time. We've lost energy. We've lost people. And a lot of people have lost heart. So, when I hear, "Well, is the aviation system back together again and everything fine?" The puzzle to, you know, putting these pieces back in this puzzle is not as easy as just throwing the pieces up in the air and ripping them apart.

Paul Rinaldi: Methodically, program by program, employee by employee, we have to put these pieces back together again so that we do it correctly, safely, and we continue to focus on the efficiency and the safety of the National Airspace System. The pressure and the extra stress that this shut down inserted into the National Airspace System was intense. How many people in this room, other than NATCA people, would go to work five straight weeks not getting paid and not knowing when you were gonna get paid? And, listen, I've heard a lot of people say this crappy answer to me, "You knew eventually you would get paid." Yeah, that doesn't work for me. Our aviation professionals had to make brutal choices. Food lines. Highly trained, highly skilled professionals worked every day and then would go to figure out how they were gonna get food. To food banks, wherever they were giving something free, they were trying to get something for their family. We had controllers going to work every day.

Paul Rinaldi: We had controllers going to work every day, a few hours before, driving a lift or an Uber. And a few hours after their shift driving a lift, a lift in an Uber or waiting on tables to put some type of economic stream back into their system to take care of their family. We've heard so many sad stories of controllers that had to decide do I continue to run this up on my credit card and I only have a few hundred dollars left of credit, to put gas in my car? Or do I continue to spend this on food for my family? Because I can't do both. 'Cause I don't know how long this is going to last. These are real decisions. They're real people, had to make every day and real consequences.

Paul Rinaldi: We heard stories of people putting their health second to their finances, and not paying the co, the copays for medication that they truly needed, or doctor visits that they truly had to have. Everybody had their own unique financial situation, and they did nothing wrong. They showed up to work. They did the job they were supposed to do. They came to work every day and they were taken hostage, economically they were taken hostage by the political process of this country.

Paul Rinaldi: The United States Congress and the White House did not have their finest moment over the shutdown.

Paul Rinaldi: So let's talk of the numbers of the destruction that happened over the last 35 days. And these are just preliminary. The shutdown is estimated to cost 11 billion dollars. 55 billion dollars of lost economic growth to our economy. The outlines have jumped up already preliminary saying 105 million dollars was lost.

Paul Rinaldi: They paid government workers 90 million dollars a day to stay home. Air Traffic Control working programs were suspended, and activities such as all our training, most of the airport construction, the maintenance on critical equipment, aviation rule making and certifications, Next Gen activities that we worked so hard on, including the Northeast Corner, Data Com, our runway safety programs, our equipment that was mitigation to, to prevent uh, a

catastrophic event from happening such as we saw the possibility in San Francisco. That equipment stopped deploying.

Paul Rinaldi: You know, the effects of the shutdown, of, of all our technology and programs will be felt for years. The FAA stopped addressing, addressing risk that identified through our voluntary reporting system programs. And that is where we could say our system was less safe, and is less safe today than it was on December 21st.

Paul Rinaldi: And now there's a possibility that the agency won't be able to meet their 2020 mandate of ADSB. We lost months, we lost years, we lost time, we lost money, we lost energy, and we lost a lot of heart. Because a lot of people came to work, but they're demoralized.

Paul Rinaldi: That's just of what we know. We're still trying to figure out what we don't know. Received a phone call yesterday from a long term friend. Showed up to work on Monday morning in Boston Center and said can't do it. I was gonna stay three more years. I'm out. We think we're gonna see a lot more of those. They don't feel valued. They're fatigued. They're stressed, and they're traumatized.

Paul Rinaldi: Our short staff facilities across the country were really stressed. As you know, if you've heard Trish and I say it once, well ... We're at a 30 year low of our fully certified controllers, of which 20% of them can retire at any moment. If 20% go, brothers and sisters and ladies and gentlemen of the aviation community, we will not be able to run the volume of traffic that we run today.

Paul Rinaldi: Making a controller takes years. From the entrance exam, through the medical process, to the background checks, through the FAA Academy, to their facility, to training every day on the job training. Three to six years to mentor that apprentice to be fully certified. We don't know how many actually left the profession that were in the training process, especially in the high cost of living areas. Uh, the Bay area, and certainly uh, Long Island. That's not their home. They were places there out of the Academy. They didn't want to be there anyway, and now they're coming to work and not getting paid and they can't afford to live. We don't know how many. We know we have lost some.

Paul Rinaldi: Ugh, facility staffing is our lifeline. It's our lifeline to modernize the system. Because the only way to successfully modernize the system is to have real live controllers, certified controllers, helping develop, implement, and train, and deploy. That's how we've been successful over the years with modernization. But when we don't have enough controllers to run the operation, and the demands are coming in from, from users across the country, something's got to give. And we have years to make up now.

Paul Rinaldi: You know, I've been asked do you think this could happen again? (Laughs). And um, you know, February 15th is 17 days from today. Are they actually going to make a deal? Who knows. But let's just look at since the start of fiscal year 2018,

of what the aviation community had to put up with. We've had three shutdowns. On September 30th of 2017 uh, we had a, we were approaching a lapse of appropriations and then we got the CR to December 12th. Or, correction, December 8th of 2017. And then it was pushed two more weeks to December 22nd of 2017.

Paul Rinaldi: And then January of this year, or actually last year, of January of 2018, January 19th, we had a three day shutdown. And some of the congressional people said it's no big deal. It happened over the weekend. It was just, you know, we were back up by Monday night. Yeah, Air Traffic Control is 24 hours a day, seven days a week, not just Monday through Friday 9:00-5:00.

Paul Rinaldi: But they said we worked out a deal you know, on February 9th everything's gonna work out fine. Until they shut down over the midnight shift on February 9th of 2018. And they said oh, now we really have a deal. And it was on, went to March 23rd of 2018. And they said uh, then the President said he doesn't want to sign anymore omnibuses, so don't give me another omnibus. This is, this is it. I'm done. And I don't think they took him for his word.

Paul Rinaldi: 'Cause October 1 came and they started piecemealing and approving appropriations process and we would, you know, we were left out. But we were extended to December 7th. And then uh, we had a president die and they didn't want to fight while they were mourning a president death. So they decided to push it to December 21st. And then that brought us through a 35 day shutdown.

Paul Rinaldi: So February 15th is 17 days away. I ask you, can this happen again? I think you're right. Every threat in appropriations creates a massive amount of work for the agency and for us of preparing for a shutdown. Because you don't know if they're going to actually extend you for another two weeks. You have to figure out who is essential, non essential, excepted, non excepted, whatever term is uh, the term [inaudible 00:22:03] of the day. And you have to communicate on every one of these projects on how you're starting to pull them down. And stopping these projects takes a lot of time to start them back up.

Paul Rinaldi: So you're looking now and saying well are we gonna start on Data Com training? Are we gonna start on you know, PBN? Are we gonna start on the Northeast Corridor? Even if we wanted to you couldn't because you've got the 15th right in front of you, you would already start the pull down.

Paul Rinaldi: And I uh, have to take a moment to really thank Teri Bristol and her leadership as the COO of the FAA, of the ATO, and the FAA. The communication, her leadership. You know, we've built this collaborative relationship and with Teri and also with ACME administrator Dan Elwell. Why is he still acting? Don't ask me. I mean that man has dealt with so many different things at this point, um, I don't know what they're looking for in a, in an FAA administrator, but he has done an outstanding job. And I, I appreciate their leadership and um, their collaboration, uh, and their support of, of the workforce.

Paul Rinaldi: You don't always have that, as we know in, in the past. And um, you know, the Secretary of Transportation, Elaine Chao was amazing. We've had dialogues, we've had conversation, we've gone back and forth. And uh, she was kind of in an awkward position if we all know the position she's in. Uh, of, of who she's married to and the fight that was going on, and what her passion is to run, uh, the Department of Transportation. And I thought she did an outstanding job and I thank her for her leadership.

Paul Rinaldi: Out of this tragedy, chaos we'll call it, could be a wonderful opportunity for every single one of us and for our industry. NACA's position on FAA reform remains unchanged as you can imagine. Uh, we do not support any one particular reform model and we, we'll meticulously review whatever would come out of Congress, or whatever aviation community would want to work on.

Paul Rinaldi: But we have four core principles that we have lived by since 2012 when we realized appropriations process is broken. Actually, I want to say the appropriations process is broken as much as I would say Congress and the White House is broken. They just refuse to get along.

Paul Rinaldi: But our first principle is to ensure the front line workforce is protected and its employees and its relationship with the FAA and its employer. That is no status quo right now. To ensure the safety and the efficiency of the system is always a top priority. That's not in our current system either. Provide a stable, predictable funding stream for the adequate support of Air Traffic Control services, staffing, hiring, training, long term modernization, preventative maintenance, and ongoing modernization for the infrastructure. That's not happening now in the system. Maintain a dynamic aviation system that continues to provide services to all the users, areas, and segments of the aviation community. I think we're falling short there.

Paul Rinaldi: Our current system does not meet any of those four core principles. So we will continue to fight to find reform, and stable, predictable funding that will meet those. And after this shutdown, I don't think any of you realize-

Paul Rinaldi: And after this shutdown, I don't think any of you realize or can say that this system is meeting your core principles, either. So, I ask you, the aviation community, are you ready yet? Are we? Is that cut deep enough for you? Did it hurt your pocketbook enough? Did it hurt aviation enough? Has it slowed down monetization enough?

Paul Rinaldi: That system, this system, was on the verge of unraveling, and we sounded the bell. Trish, myself, our activists, our national executive board, we were all over the news. Not to scare anybody, to inform everybody. We didn't know how we were going to hold this together much longer. The reports we were getting, which, of course, the FA wasn't seeing, because the office that would re- review those reports and act on them was furloughed.

Paul Rinaldi: We were getting text messages from controllers of 17 and 18 years worth of experience, climbing airplanes into each other because they're distracted, because they were thinking about their mortgage. They were thinking about school payments, car payments, food. They were thinking about this shutdown.

Paul Rinaldi: We work really hard to mitigate distractions out of our workforce, and we just inserted all these distractions and thoughts into their heads while they were working airplanes. And, we were starting to see this, and we were deeply concerned, and we asked every one of our controllers to watch out for each other. But, when you start seeing 17 years, I've never made that mistake, I don't know what I was doing. We do. They were struggled.

Paul Rinaldi: The aviation system in this country is a national treasure. 12 million well-paying, great jobs attributed to aviation. \$1.5 trillion in gross domestic product to our economy every year, 5% of our gross domestic product. As of December 31, 2018, the airways, uh, the Airport and Airways Trust Fund balance w- well, for 2018, brought in \$15 billion. And a side note, it still collected money during the shutdown. Uncommitted balance in the, in the Airport Airways Trust Fund, \$6.5 billion. Total trust fund revenues have increased steadily since 2009 and so will s- is about to be projected to generate \$20 billion a year by 2020.

Paul Rinaldi: Given the damage that we saw over the last 35 days, and the tens of billions of dollars that we've put into monetizing this system, and that we constantly have to stop and go, isn't it time, stakeholders? Isn't it time, aviation people, to say there's got to be a better way to fund aviation? I certainly think it is.

Paul Rinaldi: Let's play a video. *[Video plays.]*

Paul Rinaldi: Aviation deserves, and the public should demand a stable, predictable funding stream for our system. Over the last 30 plus days, I was asked over a hundred times of what my opinion, uh, was on a wall. And, my answer was simple. I'm not an expert in immigration, or gun control, or Planned Parenthood, or healthcare. These are all issues that threatened or caused government shutdowns in the past. We cannot continue to hold the federal workers and, the aviation workers, and our national aviation system, our bus- your businesses, and our economy hostage for issues that just aren't germane to aviation.

Paul Rinaldi: Out of this shutdown, Congress, the Senate, and the White House signed it. They passed something called the Federal Employee Fair Treatment Act, that all federal employees will receive lost pay and leave during the p- during the lapse of appropriations, but they'll have to wait until they decide to work their issue out. It's terrorism. I want to ... You do your job, stay at home, destroy our economy. You'll have to wait until I decide to pay you.

Paul Rinaldi: They paid \$90 million a day for people to stay home and not do their jobs. Make them come to work, and do their jobs, and pay them. There's no reason to shut the government down, now that you have this law. This should never happen

again, and I hope the aviation community, together, has said enough is enough. We've lost time, money, energy, and a lot of heart. Stand up for stable, predictable funding for our aviation system. Stand up for yourselves, for your livelihoods. Stand up for the United States, for stable, predictable funny.

Paul Rinaldi: And, I thank you. There are certain people in this room ... Well, she's not here, but Sara Nelson of AFA was an absolute rockstar, standing side-by-side with us. Joe DePete of ALPA, I'm sure he's here somewhere. I don't know where the ALPA table is. Your solidarity with your organization was been amazing. And, Trish Gilbert, our executive vice president, may have driven us all crazy at times, but, uh, she had a lot of great ideas and which we strived and were successful at.

Paul Rinaldi: And, my wife. Uh, as you could imagine, I'm not an easy person to live with when we don't have a shutdown. [Room laughs.] So, I'm surprised she came to the lunch.

Paul Rinaldi: This shutdown can't happen again for another reason. Our air traffic controllers cannot eat another damn slice of pizza.

Paul Rinaldi: 35 straight days, starting with the Canadian Air Traffic Controllers Union, and our brothers and sisters at ALPA, and unions, air traffic control unions from around the world, the airlines, other unions, aviation groups, general aviation, you overfed us to a point we all need that, a damn diet ... We used to be fit and beautiful. We'll get back there, I'm sure, someday.

Paul Rinaldi: Thank you to every single one of you that helped us during this tremendous time of need, signing on to industry letters, participating in our rallies, helping us at airport leafleting. And you saw in that video, it's not fun to leaflet. Passengers don't want to hear that, you know. They have to do something. And, they're carrying their bags, and you're trying to give them a piece of paper, and, normally, women don't walk past Eddie DeLisle. Now, women walk right past him. I mean, normally they stop to talk to them.

Paul Rinaldi: But, we will never forget, uh, your acts of kindness. Uh, you lifted up our spirits, and you, you showed us that, uh, you guys really do care. So, thank you, and thanks for having me today, and I hope you don't get caught in the snow for staying here today. So, thank you.