

Washington Meets NATCA Board

Prior to the last NATCA Executive Board Meeting, MEBA hosted a special reception to introduce your Regional Representatives and Alternates to members of Congress, key congressional staffers and various other groups from the aviation community.

The highlight of the evening was the appearance of Congressman Norm Mineta (D-CA), Chairman of the Aviation Subcommittee of the House Public Works & Transportation Committee.

Congressman Mineta spoke very highly of the NATCA organizing effort. He complimented the Regional Representatives for their hard work and dedication to air safety. He stated that he saw NATCA emerging as a forceful voice for air safety.



Dennis Delaney (r.), NATCA Southern Region Representative, discusses current air traffic issues with Congressman Norm Mineta (D-CA), chairman of the powerful House Public Works and Transportation Subcommittee on Aviation.



Discussing campaign strategy are, from left to right, Gary Molen, NATCA Northwest Mountain Region Representative, Edward Mullin, NATCA Southwest Region Representative, Joseph Dunigan, NATCA Alaska Region Representative and Dave Brown, Northwest Mountain Alternate Representative (back to camera).

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NATCA

NEWSLETTER

MARCH 1987

NATCA Urges Congress To Restore Reporting Immunity



Dennis Delaney, NATCA Southern Region Representative (l.), John Thornton, NATCA National Coordinator (c.), and Howie Barte, NATCA New England Region Representative (r.) testify before the Senate Aviation Subcommittee.

A panel of NATCA spokesmen recently told a Senate panel that Congress could immediately improve air safety by restoring the reporting immunity system that was eliminated in 1980.

Testifying on January 30th before the Senate Aviation Subcommittee, the three NATCA representatives also urged Congress and the aviation community to join forces and free money from the Aviation Trust Fund. The badly-needed dollars could be used to hire additional Controllers and replace outmoded equipment and software.

Dennis Delaney, a Controller at the Pensacola Tower and NATCA's Southern Region Representative,

told the subcommittee about the chronic understaffing at many FAA facilities.

He testified that there are 40 percent fewer Controllers at the Pensacola ATCT than in 1981, yet the facility handles the same number of air operations. According to Mr. Delaney, the situation is far worse at other facilities, such as Atlanta, where there are fewer Controllers but an increasing number of flights. Curiously enough at Pensacola, the number of supervisors and staff are the same as in 1981 while the number of Controllers has been cut in half.

Howie Barte, a Controller at the Providence, R.I. Tower and NATCA's New England Region

Representative, spoke of the appalling deterioration of equipment that is essential to the Controller and air safety.

Mr. Barte stated that the problem was twofold. First, he said, much of the equipment used by the ATC is worn out and antiquated. Newer equipment cannot be brought on line because the FAA has picked suppliers that often prove to be financially unsound and unreliable. Furthermore, according to Mr. Barte, "equipment of substandard performance", such as the Inter-communication Switching System which was purchased and installed without Controller input, "never seems to work correctly."

The second major equipment-related problem involved cutbacks of Systems Specialists who repair and maintain hardware. Mr. Barte stated that the FAA will not replace technicians who retire or resign.

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NATCA Election Petition Certified!

The Federal Labor Relations Authority announced February 11th that NATCA has won the right to hold an election. The FLRA stated that NATCA met the requirement that at least 30 percent of the Controller work force sign a petition stating that they seek professional representation. NATCA far exceeded the minimum figure and is still adding signatures to the 5,800 it submitted in January.

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Due to these reductions, Systems Specialists are only on duty at many facilities from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. However, air traffic is moving virtually 24 hours a day. When "equipment fails after normal hours, the Air Traffic Controller is often left to operate with a crippled system to control the air traffic in the sky," Mr. Barte concluded.

NATCA National Coordinator John Thornton told the panel at the start of the oversight hearing that the Controllers were building a professional association for a number of reasons: "There are, of course, traditional issues such as working conditions, redress of grievances, and bargaining. We are, however, concerned as well about the larger issue of air safety and the public's right to the best air traffic system it is possible to provide."

Mr. Thornton went on to state that Controllers should be consulted by the FAA when decisions are made regarding the integrity of the system. "Air safety is simply too important not to include every source of advice."

The National Coordinator also

observed that NATCA believes that the Congress and the public need to hear the Controllers' voice. He pointed out that the American people need a balanced picture of the strengths and the weaknesses of the Air Traffic Control System so that informed decisions can be made. "The Controllers can help provide that balanced picture and in so doing help serve the public. Their bottomline concerns are not budgets and bureaucratic politics. They care about safety and lives," NATCA stated.

Commenting on the restoration of the immunity system, Mr. Thornton testified that the immunity provisions "encouraged Controllers to report even their own errors . . . so the system could be improved."

While noting that immunity

"We cannot risk continuing with . . . budgets as usual, in the Air Traffic Control System. These problems need to be addressed now, not five years from now."

**Howie Barte
NATCA New England Region
Representative**



Senate Majority Leader Robert C. Byrd (D-WV) calls upon the White House to comply with the law and appoint members to the Aviation Safety Commission.

provisions would not apply in cases of "gross negligence, criminal offenses, or accidents," NATCA stated that they prompted Controllers to provide the expertise and corrective actions needed to help prevent near misses and other system deviations. Since the provisions were dropped in 1980, NATCA observed, the reporting system has become "punitive," and has "discouraged" Controllers from providing critically needed information concerning lapses in the system."

In its statement for the hearing record, NATCA also called upon the White House to fulfill its legal obligation to make appointments to the Aviation Safety Commission. The Association also urged the hiring and training of 3,000 additional Controllers and requested that air traffic levels be restricted to 1981 levels until the system is strengthened.

NATCA further opposed the reinstitution at the present time of holding traffic above airports and the creation of a private corporation to run the FAA.

Eastern Region Makes Ready for Election Drive

NATCA's Eastern Region is wasting no time gearing up for the certification election this spring. On February 2nd, between 30 and 35 NATCA representatives from approximately 30 FAA facilities in 7 states met outside Baltimore/Washington International Airport to discuss organizing and election strategy.

Steve Bell, NATCA's Eastern Region Representative and a Controller at the New York TRACON, chaired the five-hour session. First on his agenda was the need to focus on the election now that NATCA's petition has been filed and certified by the Federal Labor Relations Authority.

Mr. Bell stressed the importance of incorporating each facility into the organizing drive. He told the representatives to find out what information the Controllers need from NATCA's



NATCA Eastern Region representatives gather in Baltimore to map out campaign strategy.



Controllers listen to John F. Leyden, Executive Director of the Federal/Postal Division, Public Employees Department of the AFL-CIO (facing, l.), discuss advantages of a collective bargaining association.

national office so that they can get out the local NATCA vote.

Mr. Bell also emphasized that NATCA can best respond to Controller needs by indentifying the major problems at each facility. He observed that facilities often differ radically from each other in their requisites. One may suffer from understaffing while another may have an acute equipment deficiency.

Tim Joyce, the NATCA New York State representative expanded on the need to establish a network of NATCA locals. At its inception, NATCA relied heavily on the national office. Information flowed out from Washington to the regions. However, as more Controllers from across the nation began joining the campaign, NATCA started to look to the regions to provide information, issues and views from the Controllers to the national office.

In this regard, Mr. Joyce outlined the structure for forming locals and discussed setting up committees within them, i.e. safety, legislation and contract. It is from this input that the national association and the Con-

troller-elected officials will be able to make informed decisions and choices.

The Eastern Region representatives also heard from John F. Leyden, Executive Director of the Federal/Postal Division, Public Employees Department of the AFL-CIO. Mr. Leyden, who spoke at the NATCA Founding Convention last September, underscored the enormous advantages of having an association like NATCA representing the Controllers as a collective group.

Mr. Leyden also stated that the Controllers need to speak for themselves before Congress. He said that the House and the Senate want to hear from the people actually working the system, not only those managing it.

Howard Johannssen, President of the Professional Airways System Specialists, was also present to lend his support and advice. He told the Controllers not to relax their campaign: "Winning an election is not enough. A 70, 80, 90 percent win . . . that's the message of strength. With that you'll get back the respect of the public."



Senator James J. Exon (D-NE), a member of the Senate Aviation Subcommittee, listens to suggestions from NATCA outside Committee hearing room.