



# International Vice President

Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, AFL-CIO  
43rd Annual Board of Directors Meeting  
Las Vegas, NV  
April 28-30, 2015

# **International Vice President Debora Sutor Remarks to the AFA-CWA Board of Directors Las Vegas - April 28, 2015**

## **Introduction**

Good Morning to the Delegates of the AFA Forty-Third Board of Directors meeting, to our AFA members in attendance, to our hard working AFA Staff and to our guests at this year's assembly.

My first year has been both exciting and challenging. However, one thing they don't tell you is that there is very little sleep involved with being International Vice President!

Seriously, I want to start by thanking my fellow officers Sara Nelson and Kevin Creighan for all of the assistance and support they've shown me in this first year in office. I also want to thank the International Staff Representatives, Guy, Deb and Toni and also Betsy Tettelbach. Everyone put up with my incessant questions as I learned my way around my new environment. Your patience and encouragement have been greatly appreciated.

I also want to express my profound thanks to ISR Deb Hassan who will be leaving us in a few short weeks. She was my ISR when I started with little Simmons Airlines 26 years ago. She has been a staunch union activist her entire career and helped countless Flight Attendants through her advocacy, hard work and dedication to our Union. She has been a staple during Union meetings, has worked on numerous AFA campaigns and walked on countless picket lines. We will all sincerely miss her and I wish nothing but very best for her bright and beautiful future.

But most importantly, I want to thank each and every one of you for giving me the extraordinary opportunity to serve you in the capacity as your International Vice President. This first year in office has afforded me the ability to get to know many

of you in a much more comprehensive way and on a deeply personal level. It's also allowed me to see our Union from a new and enlightening perspective. You have given me the gift of viewing our Union and our industry through your eyes. There are many different lenses each of you look through every day while advocating for your members, beating back corporate greed, upholding our contracts and building our power from within to make our Union the leading voice for Flight Attendants. I've witnessed your labors and empathize with your struggles. There can be no doubt that management at every airline has little regard for their employees or our collective bargaining agreements and are perpetrating the biggest race to the bottom I think we've ever experienced.

So how do we fight back?

I'll tell you how

- **By building** our collective power! We mobilize to build our clout from within and we organize to strengthen our overall base and to unite all Flight Attendants in our fight to promote social and economic justice.
- **By supporting** our contract negotiations and advocating campaigns such as "bridging the gap" in which we work to level the playing field by beating back disparate work rules and wages.
- **By wearing** our union pin as a symbol of the pride we have in our Union and our profession. This small gesture means so much; much more than most of us imagine. I am a proud member of the Association of Flight Attendants. I wear my pin everyday as a symbol of the pride I have in my Union! I know I can count on you to do the same and to promote this show of power and solidarity amongst the members you represent.

From mainline to regional, from LCCs to charter flying, we are all Flight Attendants, safety professionals and aviation's first responders. We stand united in our resolve to defend our rights. I thank all of you for the hard work and dedication that you put forth every day to protect our members and promote our

profession. I couldn't be more honored than to serve alongside such valued labor leaders.

## **The Year at a Glance**

### ***Basic Leadership Training:***

My term of office began with the introduction of Basic Leadership Training. This training ushered in a new look for our basic leadership training. Traditionally, this training was six (6) days in duration. Responding to past attendee feedback, and in consultation with the Leadership Development committee, we decided to split the training split into two parts as follows:

- **Part One:** Subsequent to the category II election cycle we held the first, 2 ½ day, portion of the New Leader Training in Washington DC at the AFL-CIO building on June 10-12, 2014. This Orientation Course occurred prior to the Officer's taking office and covered
  - an overview of AFA's structure including the Constitution and Bylaws,
  - a familiarization of the resources available to assist leaders at the International Office,
  - a review of responsibilities of a newly elected officer,
  - guidance on allowable expenses and
  - advice on transitioning successfully into the new term of office.
  
- **Part Two:** After our new leaders took office, we held the second 3 ½ day session at the Maritime Institute on August 11-14, 2014. The training focused on the roles and responsibilities of their office including:
  - building and strengthening the union through mobilizing,
  - effective local committees, member meetings and communications,
  - use of the grievance procedure and tools for working with management to advocate on behalf of our members.

Leaders were introduced to time management and goal planning and were also trained on the membership services systems. Two guest speakers at this session, CWA President Larry Cohen and National Mediation Board

Member Nicholas Geale addressed the group. In addition, we held a panel discussion on the topic of social media. The panel included John Morse from the AFA Legal Department, Corey Caldwell formerly with the AFA Communications Department and Lee Anderson, Digital Strategist at the AFL-CIO.

The critiques from the training have validated this new split format for Basic Leadership Training. Our new leaders found the bifurcation very helpful because they entered office prepared and then were given another forum to address concerns that came up and have direct application of their newly learned skillset.

### ***Endeavor Campaign:***

The next key event of my term began with an internal mobilizing campaign at Endeavor Airlines in July of last year.

Our primary goal was to increase bargaining power by **first** - increasing the number of members, and **second** - collecting the substantial amount of outstanding dues. Endeavor Air (EDV) is an airline created by the merger of three regional airlines; Mesaba (previously AFA-CWA), with Pinnacle and Colgan (both previously represented by the USW). Approximately two thirds of the existing 1,200 Flight Attendant employees within the bargaining unit were previous USW members and many have been slow to join the AFA-CWA and pay dues. In only a few short months we made great strides.

At the onset of the campaign only 82% were signed up to pay dues through payroll deduction; through our efforts, 90% now pay dues through payroll deduction. We've increased the number of members by nearly 10 percent. Additionally, nearly 42% of the bargaining unit was not in good standing. I am happy to report to you today that we have brought that number down significantly to 13% and captured thousands of dollars in outstanding back dues.

I want to recognize the hard work of the Endeavor MEC and the mobilizers who worked on this campaign. They have really done an outstanding job and their perseverance and commitment to this union have been extraordinary and an example for all of us.

### ***AFA Welcomes Silver Flight Attendants to our Union:***

I was first contacted on October 21, 2014 by a somewhat shy and retiring Silver Flight Attendant named John Mayo. Together with activist and now Local Transitional President, Tahja Roberts, we began a swift organizing campaign at the airline and were able to collect authorization cards from approximately 80% of the Flight Attendants. We immediately filed for an election and it was granted by the NMB.

On January 8<sup>th</sup>, polls closed. This meant we were able to organize and hold an election in a little over 2 months. It is with great pride that I welcome the Silver Flight Attendants into our AFA family. Flight Attendants voted to join AFA by a majority of 78 percent of the votes cast. We look forward to working with Silver Flight Attendants as they journey down the path to secure the protections and pay raises they deserve in a collective bargaining agreement.

### ***Air Tran Flight Attendants Make Their Final Transition***

In January, the last class of Air Tran Flight Attendants completed training at Southwest Airlines, thus making the transition complete. This last class included some of the most dedicated and loyal union leaders I've ever had the privilege to work with. These leaders chose to remain at Air Tran in order to serve their members until the very end. They could have chosen to cross over to Southwest long ago, but instead, they selflessly put the members' well-being first.

I speak of course of Travis Bruce and Eric McCulley. Sara and I were honored to be asked to pin their wings during the Southwest graduation ceremony. This marked a very poignant moment for us. While AFA was losing a group of extraordinary Flight Attendants, we knew they had a good home and would remain a part of a labor union with their rights protected by a collective bargaining agreement. These Flight Attendants will be an asset to our brothers and sisters at TWU Local 555. We wish nothing but the best for a long and successful career at Southwest for all of our members from Air Tran.

### ***Advanced Leadership Training***

Another first in training at AFA: Advanced skills-based Leadership Training. This 4-day session in February was held in Portland, OR. Last year the Board directed the creation of a new training focus in which leaders could develop new skills and hone existing ones. This represented a departure from previously taught, authority or lecture style, teaching method. In consultation with the Leadership Development Committee, we began the process building this new training last September. To lead the training, the Committee chose the team of Barbara Byrd and Bob Bussell from the University of Oregon.

Feedback from the training was very positive. We have already begun the process of discussing how we can fine tune this skills based training and make it everything you want it to be. Thank you to all of you who took the time to provide your assessments. We are also constructing an online critique form that can be used by those who've not yet had the opportunity to convey their thoughts and ideas.

### ***New Officer Orientation***

As is always exciting to see, we welcomed several new officers to our Union during out of cycle elections. On April 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> we conducted a new officer orientation at the International office during which we were able to provide training to 10 new AFA leaders. We welcome all of you and thank you for stepping forward to represent our members and further our careers.

### **Oversight of International Committees**

#### ***Electronic Communication and Social Media***

It would be difficult to put my finger on another item that is such a help and such a curse at the same time. But we all agree that the moment has come to manage this beast.

I was assigned to oversee the Electronic Communication and Social Media committee created at last year's assembly. It has been a pleasure to work with

such innovative individuals. The Committee has submitted a report and an agenda item for your consideration so I won't go into too much detail. The Committee created a policy designed to encompass varying forms of social media, not just Facebook. The goal of the policy is to focus on legalities and protection of the organization. I know any one of our outstanding Committee members be glad to answer any questions you may have.

### ***Flight Crew Technical Corrections Act***

This Committee, also created at last year's assembly, has spent the past 12 months investigating this correction to the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA). The report will be presented tomorrow afternoon during our program so I don't want to spill the beans, but – **spoiler alert** - we were able to create some new educational tools for leaders and members. The AFA International website now contains resources such as an updated Q&A, a checklist to determine eligibility, information about varying State FMLA laws and DOL forms. None of these resources was previously available to members and leaders, so we are very proud of the work we've been able to accomplish. I'd like to thank the members of the Committee as well as Heather Healey and Mary Lou Savage for their hard work in creating this Family Resource Center.

### ***Leadership Development***

The Leadership Development Committee is a standing committee of the Board of Directors. While I've briefly touched upon the trainings we conducted this year, I would encourage you to read through the comprehensive report provided by the committee. They are an absolutely outstanding group of leaders and we could not have done all that we did this past year without their help and guidance. We engaged in countless conference calls and exchanged what seemed like an endless stream of e-mail communications regarding our trainings. Thank you to the committee for their time and contribution in educating the leaders of our Union.

## ***Negotiations Policy Committee***

The Negotiations Policy Committee is also a standing committee of the Board of Directors. This is a subject near and dear to my heart because I had the privilege of serving on this committee from 2006 until just last year when I assumed the role of International Vice President. It was great to see many of you at Sunday night's Negotiations Roundtable discussion. Part of the Committee's work this year included the development of a page on the AFA International website where all AFA and other airline contracts are housed and can be easily accessed in one location. We had received requests from several leaders, particularly those in contract negotiations, to provide a resource like this to for ease of research.

I think you'll find this a valuable tool. You can access this new resource by clicking on the Collective Bargaining tab of our website. The committee has also submitted a written report for your consideration.

## **Continuing Education**

Sadly, as many of you know, the National Labor College closed in April of last year. The Association of Flight Attendants enjoyed a Partnership Program with the National Labor College (NLC) for over a decade with many of our AFA-sponsored training programs providing college credits. The Partnership allowed many AFA Leaders and members to attain their degrees while receiving some credit for the work they did on behalf of our union.

One of my goals when taking office was to identify a viable alternative to the NLC which would benefit our leaders and members in much the same manner as that of the partnership we enjoyed with the NLC.

Over the last few months we have investigated a new home for AFA's program. We explored opportunities for evaluation of our AFA-CWA training courses for college credit with SUNY Empire State College. As stated in the EXBOD report, it is referred to as 'prior learning evaluation' or PLE. Initial review of the Criteria and Procedures for Professional Learning Evaluations indicates considerable time and costs associated with each AFA-CWA training course evaluation submitted. As an

organization, we would need to explore these costs further to determine if they satisfy the needs of our current members and leaders.

I have provided a detailed attachment to this report for your review but to try and sum up, much of the knowledge AFA-CWA members gain through their FAA, workplace, and union training may be equivalent to learning that may be taught in a higher education institution and, as such, could be recognized with college-level credit through Prior Learning Assessments. There may also be an opportunity for us to garner credit for our Initial Flight Attendant training.

As mentioned before, there are financial costs attached to the evaluation of these trainings to determine if college credit may be given, so this may be a discussion for a different time, but I thought it important that the leaders of our Union be provided the research information for your consideration.

During the research phase of this project I was surprised to uncover and identify a number of other opportunities I hadn't previously known existed. I realized there was a fairly broad spectrum of both credited and non-credited courses available to us through our CWA affiliation. I have invited Kevin Celata, to help explain some of these available resources.

Kevin Celata is the Training Administrator for the CWA/NETT Academy, a training program operating out of the President's office at CWA. He has over 15 years of experience in managing distance learning programs as well as coordinating national training partnerships with community colleges, union locals, workforce development boards as well as industry employers in order to expand job skill training opportunities for all the CWA membership.

The CWA/NETT Academy is a comprehensive distance based training and resource center designed to provide CWA members with anywhere, anytime, anyplace enrollment in Technology, Media, Manufacturing and Healthcare and personal enrichment courses. Many of which are offered at no cost CWA members and their families.

Kevin has a table set up outside of our meeting room. I encourage you take some time to speak with him about the educational opportunities available to you, your

family and your members. He has a lot of information and will even walk you through some of the online education programs on tablets he's brought with him.

### **Organizing – Outlook For Our Future**

I am excited about the future of our Union. We have the opportunity to grow our union and to bring us one step closer to our mission statement of uniting all professional Flight Attendants. We are poised to launch an organizing campaign at GoJet Airlines immediately following close of the Board meeting. GoJet employs approximately 450 Flight Attendants with significant projected growth resulting from the delivery of new CRJ-900s beginning in June of this year. Soon after the GoJet campaign launch, we'll also begin an organizing drive in earnest at Skywest Airlines where there are over 2,000 unrepresented Flight Attendants spread out over 15 different domicile locations. While this may seem a daunting task, we are "all in" for the challenge. We've already begun the process and one of the first steps I undertook was to update our AFA organizing website at [yourafa.org](http://yourafa.org). The new site contains numerous educational pieces that are applicable to all organizing campaigns while simultaneously providing pages relevant to targeted and specific campaigns.

Organizing GoJet is critical more now than ever given the way that the parent company, Trans States Holding, is openly engaging in an assault upon our union at sister carrier Compass Airlines. Management at Compass is non-responsive to the Union, has attacked our leaders and refused to arbitrate grievances. While we continue to provide our Union's full support to the Compass Flight Attendants in their fight against Trans States Holdings, I can only imagine what it must be like to work for GoJet where there are no union protections, no work rules, no established wage scales, and no union advocates. Organizing at GoJet means that AFA will represent two of the three carriers operated under Trans States Holdings umbrella. Once we are successful, we will have increased our power through sheer numbers.

Airline experts predict that a consolidation or contraction of the Regional side of our industry may soon be upon us. It is imperative that we organize to unite Flight Attendants as we stand on the precipice of this new era in the regional industry. We have learned through the pain of consolidation at our mainline carriers what it takes to safeguard our collective bargaining agreements and rights. Should any one of our current member airlines merge with another unrepresented group, all of the hard-earned wages, seniority rights and other provisions of their collective bargaining agreement could be jeopardized. Yet one more reason to organize and elevate all Flight Attendants.

Part of fighting the race to the bottom and bridging the gap begins with raising the quality of life for all Flight Attendants and to ensure we collectively bargain for legally binding wages, work rules and protections. AFA is our Union and we intend to keep it that way, just make it greater than it already is. Through organizing we increase our bargaining leverage and amplify our power through expanded numbers.

We have provided each of you with an authorization card for GoJet. I'd like to challenge each one of you find a way to sign up at least one GoJet Flight Attendant. They operate as both United Express and Delta Connection. During your travels if you could take the time to have a conversation with just one GoJet Flight Attendant about the benefits of becoming an AFA member, that would go so very far. Personal conversations allow us to make personal connections. Making those personal connections with other Flight Attendants, who are just like us, is what organizing is all about. So please, please, please take the time to make at least one personal connection.

I'll leave you with this. Our members have a democratic voice at all levels of our Union. We represent a wide breadth of different individuals who possess their own unique thoughts and ideas. Our diversity is one of our greatest strengths and it is through that diversity that creativity, vision and growth are born. Our Union will always have new challenges to face. It is how we meet those challenges that makes the difference. We are truly Stronger Together; Better Together.

Thank you.