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PROFESSIONAL AIRWAYS SYSTEMS SPECIALISTS

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Marion C. Blakey
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20591

Administrator Blakey:

I am writing to share my concern with the current state of labor relations between the FAA and its unions, as well as my alarm over the direction the agency seems to be heading with regard to its employees. To be candid, I do not expect that you will share my worries. However, I cannot remain silent regarding something about which I feel so strongly.

Let me begin by saying that the current state of labor relations within the FAA is shocking. I know there has been a change in ideology and labor relations philosophy at the top of the FAA, but the change is so dramatic that it defies mere ideology. The change is of a magnitude that is reserved for crusades or, perhaps more appropriately, vendettas. And from the receiving end, I can tell you that it feels like a vendetta—a bitter, destructive feud. I can think of nothing else that accounts for not only the actions of top FAA officials but also the tenor that is used in taking and explaining those actions.

It is clear to PASS leadership, and the leaders of the other FAA unions with whom I have spoken, that the agency is intent on asserting its “management rights” in such a spiteful way that union members will get a clear message that FAA management is in charge and there is nothing the unions can do about it. For my part, I have no quarrel with the agency over true management rights. When those rights are asserted in a manner that is meant to instill fear and apprehension in employees, however, I believe things have gone too far. You can claim your rights without trampling on mine, which is exactly what you are doing today.

A quote from Gore Vidal seems appropriate to the situation: *“It is not enough to succeed; others must fail.”* It feels to me like “winning” is not enough for FAA management these days. Ensuring that unions lose seems to be much more important.

Whatever motivation is driving the agency’s attacks on its employees and unions, it is a misguided effort that will ultimately hurt the agency and further erode aviation safety. Long after you and your political-appointee colleagues have moved on, the agency will be dealing with the

aftermath of its current assault on employees and unions. I ask that you consider those who will succeed you as FAA administrator and work with the FAA's unions to develop an open, respectful relationship that recognizes the opinions and value that each side brings to dealing with the issues facing the agency.

Furthermore, the amount of false and misleading information coming from FAA officials these days is appalling. I realize that this is Washington, where the truth is often subject to ideological interpretation, but the FAA appears to have bought into the idea of bending the truth to fit a desired outcome.

I learned just this week that FAA officials are spreading a most disturbing fabrication. During recent briefings to staff members of key House and Senate committee members, FAA officials stated that the current impasse with NATCA is the only "dispute" that the agency has with its unions. While we both know that is not true, what is most upsetting is not the deception itself, but the lack of respect that it shows to the FAA employees represented by PASS who remain at impasse with the agency over negotiations for new collective bargaining agreements. Your recent public statements have also included assertions that the negotiations between the FAA and NATCA have been "exhaustive" after a little more than nine months. How do you imagine the employees that PASS represents in the Flight Standards, Civil Aviation Registry, Aviation System Standards and Manufacturing Inspection District Office bargaining units, whose negotiations have been at impasse for *three years*, feel when they hear that the agency considers nine months exhaustive?

You further claim that "our statute requires impasses to be submitted to Congress," referring to language in Title 49 U.S.C. concerning changes to the FAA's personnel management system. Again, your assertion is contrary to your actions regarding PASS bargaining units that are at impasse. I want to stress that I am not encouraging the FAA to submit its impasses with PASS to Congress; I am simply expressing my disappointment with the wide range of positions that the agency has on the same subject. I believe that the agency submits impasses to Congress because it wants to submit the impasses not because it feels they must be submitted.

Your recent choice to decline NATCA President John Carr's offer to resume negotiations is also disappointing. I have read your response and the reasons it contained. Your reply seemed to be more about "checking a box" than responding to a legitimate request from the president of one of the FAA's unions. Your complete dismissal of the offer without any exploration at all is consistent with the objective of doing things *to* unions rather than *with* them. I must tell you that it comes across as spiteful and politically convenient to dismiss the offer so quickly.

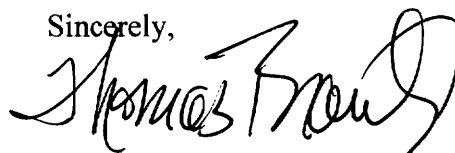
I urge you to put aside whatever animosity you may have for NATCA or its leadership and reconsider NATCA's offer to resume negotiations. If resuming negotiations ultimately fails, all you have lost is time. Despite the agency's declarations of doom, I believe a couple of months hiatus from imposing a contract on its employees will not cause the FAA irrevocable harm. On the other hand, if resuming negotiations turns out to be successful, what the agency gains in good will from its employees should not be taken too lightly. The ultimate success or failure of the FAA rests on its employees, and taking from them their most important rights as employees, the right to collectively bargain, will have far-reaching consequences for the agency.

As for PASS's recent tentative agreement with the agency on a new agreement for employees represented by PASS in the System Operations (formerly Airway Facilities) bargaining unit, let me say to you personally that this is *not* an agreement that PASS supports. Based on discussions with PASS bargaining team members, as well as my own observations, it is unmistakable that FAA management has no intention of negotiating an agreement that is acceptable to PASS. It is clear to me that FAA management believes they can eventually force their anti-worker contract terms on employees. This is evident by the behavior and statements of management officials during negotiations. Agency negotiators consistently disregarded the needs of PASS and the employees that PASS represents beyond what can be characterized as the usual "give-and-take" of negotiations.

A crucial part of any agreement negotiated by PASS is that it must be able to withstand the scrutiny of PASS members. Any collective bargaining agreement reached by PASS with the FAA *must be ratified* by our membership! During this recent round of negotiations, I believe the agency was only concerned with giving the *appearance* of negotiating until the deadline for completion of bargaining, at which time it planned to present its proposal to Congress and implement a contract without PASS agreement or member ratification.

With that in mind, I feel it is my obligation to allow PASS members to weigh in on the agency's proposal. That is why I decided to tentatively accept the agency's offer and put it to our membership for ratification. In all of its previous contract ratifications, PASS has recommended that members vote "Yes." However, given the terms that the FAA wants to impose on employees, PASS's elected officers are unanimous in strongly encouraging members to vote "**No**" on this ratification. I sincerely hope that a "No" vote by its membership will educate FAA management about what PASS members are not willing to accept simply because the agency feels it is in complete control of the bargaining process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas Brantley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Thomas Brantley
President
Professional Airways Systems Specialists

cc: PASS Executive Board
John Carr, NATCA President