

Inflight Negotiations Update – July 10, 2015

- Target date for completion of tentative agreement approaching
- United and AFA move negotiations to Washington, DC
- AFA claims parties remain “far apart” on economic framework for a joint agreement

Negotiators for United and AFA met this week in Chicago to continue discussions for a joint collective bargaining agreement. We remain committed to reaching an agreement, but there is a long list of open items yet to be resolved. While we closed the gap on several subjects this week, including CRAF, military charters and commuter policy, we made little progress closing out other important sections. As it turned out, unfortunately, there was also very limited progress made during the three weeks of negotiations in June, and with the disappointing results this week, there is the very real possibility that United and AFA will not reach agreement by the July 23 target date.

While we are as disappointed as you are, the likelihood that negotiations will take longer than anticipated is no reason to worry or panic. Virtually all labor negotiations take longer than expected, and certainly longer than the company, the union or employees desire. That’s the reason United and AFA set a “target” date, not a “deadline.” In fact, negotiations continued past the original target dates for all of the work groups at United that have reached joint agreements – including pilots, dispatchers, airport ramp and customer service agents, storekeepers, load planners, and flight and maintenance instructors. Missing the target doesn’t mean we won’t reach a deal, and doesn’t even necessarily mean that a deal is far off.

On July 13, United and AFA will continue negotiations in Washington, DC. Senior staff and mediators from the National Mediation Board will join negotiations, and we expect the NMB will push the parties hard all the way to the end. We think this is good. Although the challenges are substantial, we can get it done – by working together in the best interests of flight attendants and the company.

All sides feel the stress of facing up to these challenges. Disagreement at the bargaining table understandably causes disappointment, and the AFA joint negotiating committee has recently expressed its disappointment in an unusually ill-tempered fashion. This is unfortunate and unhelpful. Giving in to the temptation to blame others only makes it harder to reach agreement in the end. United won’t criticize or disparage AFA or members of the Union joint negotiating committee who are doing their best in difficult circumstances. Doing so won’t help us reach agreement.

Instead, United is trying to develop solutions. For many months United has provided AFA with detailed financial data and analysis, and in June United presented a framework for an agreement that would be economically equivalent to the industry-leading agreement recently executed at American Airlines. AFA has not yet responded with its own financial analysis or proposal, other than saying “we are really far apart” (AFA has declined to say exactly how far apart it believes we are). When AFA proposes its own economic framework, which we expect next week, the parties will be in a better position to understand, and hopefully resolve, their differences.

No matter the challenges, disagreements or disappointments, United remains focused on maintaining respectful and productive relationships and a positive and optimistic approach to these negotiations, and we remain firmly committed to reaching an agreement that’s fair to flight attendants and fair to the company.