

# FAA AND NATCA CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS



Federal Aviation  
Administration

*December 6, 2005*

## ***FAA's Call for Mediation***

The FAA began contract negotiations in July 2005 with the National Air Traffic Controller's Association, the union that represents the FAA's 14,000-plus controllers. Unfortunately, after nearly five months of negotiation, NATCA is still avoiding the difficult issues at the heart of the contract: rates of pay, staffing, scheduling, working hours and key work rules. On several of these issues the Union has not altered its opening position. Although NATCA makes much of the fact that we have tentatively agreed on many other minor matters - - things like the use of government telephones and printing of the agreement - - we cannot satisfactorily conclude this negotiation absent significant progress on the critical pay and financial issues.

But rather than respond to issues of substance, NATCA has recently put forward dozens of new contract proposals. These proposals largely deal with topics that are either non-negotiable (and excessively infringe on the agency's rights) or are otherwise already off the table. The agency has exercised its right not to bargain over many "permissive" topics. NATCA now erroneously claims that the FAA has refused to negotiate these "31 vital matters," when it is NATCA's persistence in pursuing them that is delaying the negotiations.

Contrary to NATCA's claims, the FAA asked for mediation twice. NATCA refused to participate. In an effort to achieve a voluntary agreement, the FAA requested the assistance of the federal mediators from the Federal Mediation Conciliation Service (FMCS).

## ***Misuse of Safety as a Bargaining Chip***

In an attempt to obscure the issues in dispute in the negotiations, NATCA is suggesting that safety is somehow in jeopardy. Thus, the day after the FAA called for mediation, NATCA made several new demands concerning "safety" programs it supposedly desires. But most of these programs are inappropriate for the bargaining table. In addition, as part of these programs, NATCA has requested that controllers be given immunity from operational errors - - in essence preventing accountability for poor performance. The FAA will not negotiate away management's right to oversee the safety of the national airspace system.

NATCA's tactics are part of a larger multi-million dollar public relations effort to mislead the American public into believing that the "sky is falling" because the system is "understaffed." These claims are just not true. Ironically enough, however, NATCA's rich contract demands if accepted would prevent us from meeting our staffing requirements and from modernizing the system.

## ***NATCA's Push for Ever More Compensation***

NATCA's proposal is out of line with the current fiscal environment facing the FAA and the industry we serve. The average controller's compensation package, including benefits, is already at \$166,000, a 74% increase over the last seven years. Yet NATCA's contract proposal seeks a 5.6% guaranteed annual increase - - above the government-wide yearly pay adjustment - - that would push the average total compensation for all controllers to exceed \$200,000 within four years. Moreover, NATCA's proposal essentially eliminates caps on salary, ignoring the marketplace and promising an acceleration of salary growth at rates faster than the rest of the FAA and the federal civil service.

The union is also demanding a shorter workday - - 7 hours, which includes a 30-minute paid lunch break. This reduces controller productivity by 12%, which right now is at 4-1/2 hours per day actually controlling traffic at our largest facilities.

NATCA wants a 50% increase in sick leave benefits and accrual rates. NATCA members presently use almost 100% of their sick leave earned, often times as a substitute for an unscheduled day off.

NATCA's proposal would add \$2.6 billion to the FAA's operating budget over five years. That's on top of the \$3.6 billion that the last agreement cost the taxpayer. Not one cent of the \$2.6 billion would fund capacity improvements, modernization, or hire new controllers. Congress approved the FAA's 10-year plan for replacing 12,000 controllers. NATCA's contract proposal will prevent us from meeting our targets.

## ***A Fair Proposal***

Under the FAA's proposal, which was largely formulated by career FAA air-traffic staff, base pay for existing employees will not be reduced. Current controllers will receive locality pay increases and would still be eligible for annual merit-based pay increases. These increases will be as much \$1300-\$3500 a year, on top of an average pay package that before benefits is worth more than \$128,000. The total average compensation with benefits is \$166,000.

The FAA's proposal seeks to bring in new hires at a more realistic pay scale, one that narrows the pay gap between controllers and the rest of the FAA's safety-focused employees. Our pay scale for new controllers takes the pay structure, for our current highest paid facilities, that was in effect in 1997 and raises it to reflect the full benefit of all pay increases provided to the rest of federal civil servants since then.

Finally, the agency is moving to remove many restrictive work rules and restore basic management rights that were lost in the last agreement. Going forward, the agency - - not NATCA - - would be in charge of daily schedules, work assignments, and decisions regarding the deployment of technology.