Covering the October 2007 MEC Meetings, Part 2 The Speech
By Kevin Jones

On day 2, October 17, I was given an opportunity to speak to the entire assembly. I wish I could just give you a copy of the speech, but I did not write it down. I spoke from notes, which I found myself not following. That often works best for me. What I write here is a synopsis of what I said.

The points I wanted to get across to our leaders came from you. I am only one line pilot. Telling them what I thought would just be one pilot's opinion. They needed to hear what you have been telling ALPAWatch. To prepare, I used your comments from the recently concluded ALPAWatch Survey "Are We Divided?" (The results of which were sent to every MEC member the week before these meetings). Also, being the only line pilot there I thought it was important to give them my personal assessment of how divided they are and the potential hazards of letting that division interfere with addressing the needs and desires of the pilots.

What I said
After thanking the group for the opportunity to speak, I told them how well received I had been. They were genuine in their hospitality and interest as to why I was there. I stated why I felt the need to spend 3 of my days off to attend these meetings. I needed to see the process first hand.

My message then turned to the politics of the group. I told them that several things were obvious. How they seem united on the idea that we will not give up another thing to the company and the damage done must be fixed. But anyone could see how divided they are as a group. Their division stems from how aggressive they are in the process of repairing the contract. On this subject they differ in degree. Some want to be more aggressive, others more methodical. I reminded them of the risk/reward model that defines an individual's value system. As a group they have a value system based on the risk/reward values of the individuals that make up the group. I made the observation that they are divided into two groups over risk vs. reward.

While this is all very understandable, I pointed out that in the end it is not what they think or want that counts. It is what the pilots want that counts. I acknowledged that they hear

negative remarks all the time from the pilots. That sometimes so many negative remarks can just become a noise that is tuned out. So while I had their attention I wanted to recount 6 comments from the 91 that pilots wrote in the ALPAWatch Survey "Are We Divided?" I explained to them that these 6 represent the second most common thought expressed to ALPAWatch. The first most common thought is "Let's get rid of ALPA," which we have been opposing on the belief that fixing NWA ALPA is a better course of action. All 6 were responses to this Question "What actions do you think the MEC could and should take to improve pilot unity?" I read these 6, reprinted here without edits:

1. A strong stance against mgt. Fight battles with them to improve the contract/lifestyle. The last MEC rolled. This one needs to stand strong to begin the unification process.

2. Quit talking about being pro-active and confrontational with the company and start doing something about it.

3. negotiating improvements to our contract that are not "cost neutral".

4. Really enhance our careers by standing up to our corrupt management and getting back our pay, work rules and retirement. This job now sucks thanks to the previous MEC... it is a hard road back but we need to be onstinate when dealing with the company for every penny they save we need a nickel back!

5. Abandon their social engineering schemes, follow precedent, and concentrate on contract repair one area at a time,starting with the junior, domestic guys. Stop robbing Peter to pay Paul within our ranks. The enemy is NWA, not the line pilots of one perceived group or another. This crisis was created by the last MEC and is growing exponentially due to the actions of the present MEC. I don't doubt most of their good intentions but the road to our unions destruction is paved with misguided good intentions. The first step is the MEC's willingness to revisit their decisions and provide facts to us and listen to our opinions before they make their decisions- not after.

6. I really don't care anymore. ALPA does not represent my interests, I feel as though I'm on my own.

Next I went on to say that there are risks to not taking action to address these concerns. Also the pilots will not take any signs of cooperation with the company very well, even if it's just a whiff of cooperation. I pointed out the fact that if they don't get busy, one day pilots with this level of dissatisfaction will be sitting in MEC seats and alluded to the negative consequences of a possible backlash situation.

I impressed on them that all this should be creating more of a sense of urgency within the leadership. I said the clock is ticking and that they need to turn up the heat on the company.

I thanked them for their time and I thanked them for all the work they do for this pilot group. They are the ones that stand between the pilots and company. They are the ones that stand between what our careers are and the company's visions of our careers.

For the remainder of that day and the next, I was thanked repeatedly for speaking to the group. Many told me how timely that message was, making comments like "They needed to hear that."

I need to thank all of you that took the time to complete the "Are We Divided?" Survey. At the time ALPAWatch asked you to take that survey, I'm sure many of you were wondering what for? There is a plan at work. This is a good example of how ALPAWatch works to ensure our union leadership hears you. Many voices are louder than one. With pilots working together this union will function as it should.

In the next issue of the ALPAWatch Newsletter, Part 3 A First Hand Account of the Elections. The actual voting process is informative but not the big story. The political power struggles between the two groups and their candidates of choice is the story.