

IAM Transportation NewsWire

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August 18, 2009

2009 Transportation Conference Underway In New York

More than 400 delegates and guests are in New York City this week for the 2009 IAM Transportation Conference, where a distinguished line-up of speakers declared their support, gratitude and solidarity with North America's air and rail workers.

High on the list of critical issues facing airline workers this year is the battle for a fair election at Delta Air Lines, where workers at the newly merged carrier will soon have an opportunity to cast ballots for IAM representation.

"We are confronted with a fight where 12,500 people stand to lose union representation at the hands of anti-union carrier Delta Air Lines," declared Transportation GVP Robert Roach, Jr. "They (Delta) may have drawn the line in the sand, but we're coming across that line. We're going to win that representation election."

On August 13, the IAM took the necessary steps to resolve representational issues for 12,700 fleet service, flight simulator technician and plant protection employees at the combined Delta Air Lines and Northwest Airlines. Similar filings will be made for passenger service, stock clerks and office & clerical employees. The elections, which will be conducted by the National Mediation Board (NMB), has the potential to be the largest organizing victory in more than a decade.

In addition to updates on the beleaguered airline industry, delegates heard from high ranking state and federal officials including California Democratic Representative Laura Richardson, who urged delegates to fight back against effort to weaken key legislation, including health care and the Employee Free Choice Act. Rep. Richardson, an IAM member from Local 1930 in California, and a co-sponsor of the original Employee Free Choice Act, warned that the legislation was under a sustained assault. "Shame on us if we let the cable channels and conservative talk show hosts direct national policy," said Richardson. "We simply cannot allow others to drive this issue."

Delegates also heard from AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Richard Trumka, AFL-CIO Executive Vice President Arlene Holt Baker and Former Lieutenant Governor of Maryland Kathleen Kennedy-Townsend. Former Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta recounted his day in office on September 11, 2001 and Rep. James Oberstar (D-MN), Chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, pledged his continued support of the FAA Reauthorization bill, legislation containing many of the major provisions the Machinists union has spearhead in recent years. And, U.S. Department of Labor Secretary Hilda Solis and Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood both issued statements of support via video.

In a keynote address that linked the transportation industry to aerospace and general manufacturing, IAM President Tom Buffenbarger called for a second economic stimulus program that invests in skills training and programs that directly benefit workers and their families.

"On July 1, we called for a second stimulus, not for the finance companies and banks that locked it away, but for the people in this room," said Buffenbarger. "It's high time this government invested in you."