

Good afternoon.

Let me begin my address to you with a sincere and personal expression of gratitude for the honor to first, share some of my thoughts with you today, at the start of your conference. And second – and no less importantly perhaps – for holding this meeting in this jewel of an American city, San Diego.

What a joy it is to get away from the searing heat of this past summer in north Texas where I work at APFA headquarters. And what a pleasant break from the increasing signs of the coming winter cold at my home in New York.

When Kelly Gambello, our National Hotel Coordinator at APFA, shared with me the agenda for this conference, I have to confess that my initial thoughts regarding my role in addressing you were along the lines of: “What could I possibly bring in the way of insight or ideas to a group of professionals who are already well-skilled and proficient in resolving their own, unique issues that impact the work life of Flight Attendants?”

I mean, I reviewed the presentation and discussion topics: site inspections? bed bugs? mold? fire safety and security? I can really add little – if anything – specific to these areas, YOUR areas of expertise.

Of course, in reflecting on your functions – and what I witness Kelly and her colleagues and counterparts accomplish daily – any concerns I had over what to touch upon vanished. I realized that my efforts here would be best served by in effect honoring you and your work, and by placing it all in a greater context.

I am, very simply, in awe of what you do – both individually as representatives of your own work groups and at your own carriers – and collectively, in gatherings such as this, or as you coordinate with each other in more informal settings.

Your unselfish zeal and dedication is truly a real-life example of what we need so much today in the modern workplace. That is – in a word – cooperation. It's a simple concept – cooperation. But it's one that offers tremendous rewards as it pertains to our industry, our profession and our futures, especially in light of the greater business climate and political trends today.

Though it would seem natural for representatives like yourselves to gather at conferences like this and share your knowledge, your ideas and your skills, it hasn't

always been this way. This cooperation – this alignment of our shared goals and the building of coalitions – crosses divisions that once separated us: be it one carrier from another, be it one work group from another, be it a unionized group from one non- (or at least not yet) unionized.

This cooperation means now, and in the future, finding and focusing on what all Flight Attendants, regardless of her or his uniform, have in common in the way of challenges, and joining forces in finding solutions.

And join forces we must.

This conference is but one current example of the way we front-line employees must forevermore do business. Its seed has grown from a need altogether modern – a need to collectively defend our profession across company and even industry lines – from clear and incessant assaults - from many fronts - on what are basic rights and human dignities.

This assault comes from corporate and political leaders who have, for all intents and purposes, methodically, systematically and with clear intent, abandoned any sense of moral or ethical duty – their social contract – towards employees.

We simply can no longer depend on employers or government agencies to sustain – let alone improve – what we require, what we demand, as rights in the workplace. We must continually fight, in fact, to prevent the dismantling of hard-earned protections we have achieved over decades, including: safety, comfort and respect on the job – whether on a plane or on a layover.

I started my flying career with American Airlines over 32 years ago. Though the age of airline deregulation was then just dawning, it was still a time when I could go to work as a Flight Attendant and not give a second thought to the many concerns that we face today. Far from being consigned to cultural history, the romanticized image of air travel was still fresh.

I had a work schedule encompassing a reasonable workday that provided a safe, secure, comfortable layover during which I could get adequate food and the time to rest and be ready for the next day. These were taken as granted – not as perks of the job. They were, and still are, common sense, basic rights.

Clearly now, the glamorous, white gloves of the golden age of flying are long gone,

replaced with flex-cuffs and duct tape. Between duty days, that leisurely meal at a café on a 30-hour layover at a downtown hotel is now too often a snack from the vending machine and 10 hours or perhaps as little as 8 hours holed-up in a noisy motel just outside – or sometimes in – the airport parking lot.

Now, I am not advocating a return to the white-gloved era, and clearly many of the changes in this career have been thrust unwillingly upon the entire industry. But the safety and the comfort – on and off the airplane – of all Flight Attendants must remain basic and undeniable rights of employment. We must see them, promote them and enforce them, as ethical and moral imperatives. They must not be subject to the whims of politicians looking to score votes or of executives chasing only the bottom line.

The only acceptable line must be the one WE draw and stand firmly, collectively behind, to demand that our employers and our government leaders – our society even – uphold the moral contract with America's working class. A social contract for fairness, for respect, for safety and security, and for dignity.

It is no exaggeration to call this a struggle for basic, human decency. And the work on the front lines of this struggle, by all of you here and in your home and base cities, is a microcosm of the greater battle played out by workers across this country and throughout the world.

That's a great burden to bear, but all of us here – whatever our carrier, whether we represent our Flight Attendant colleagues through a union or another committee structure – shoulder an increasing weight of responsibility toward the general welfare of the professional Flight Attendant and the vanishing American middle-class.

This conference and your committees, and countless others like them, herald the growing wave of expanding cooperation among previously disparate groups. It touches all areas that impact our profession: from hotels to health, safety to security, work rules to retirement – all the way to jointly lobbying the leaders in our nation's halls of highest political power.

We possess the knowledge and the skills to achieve what we need to take care of ourselves, to thrive in our professional futures. We must look after ourselves and support each other because the paternalistic ways of old are broken, and they are gone.

We have proven that we are up to the task; this conference proves you are up to the task. So I applaud all of you here today, for sacrificing your time and energies to better the working conditions of your colleagues.

This cooperative spirit is a grand example for others to follow as much as it is a demonstration of our collective resolve to protect and enhance our chosen career, our profession and to support our sisters and brothers who put on wings and leave their homes to protect and serve the flying public.

You have my full support, my greatest respect and admiration, and I hope you have a great conference. Thank you.

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