

Dear Congressman,

I am writing in response to your recent letter concerning former TWA Flight Attendants who are in the collective bargaining unit represented by the Association of Professional Flight Attendants (APFA). APFA represents the approximately 17,500 Flight Attendants employed by American Airlines. We value you as a friend and appreciate your many efforts to support legislative issues impacting Flight Attendants as well as your record of supporting labor in general. For this reason, it is particularly important that we provide you with information that will help you understand this situation.

When American Airlines bought TWA in 2001 – long before I was APFA’s President – APFA and American Airlines negotiated a Seniority Integration Agreement (SIA) which governs the seniority of the former TWA Flight Attendants. Under that agreement, those Flight Attendants received full credit for pay and benefit purposes for the seniority they had earned while working at TWA. There was a provision in the SIA that allowed former TWA Flight Attendants, who remained continuously based in St. Louis, the ability to use their TWA Seniority for bidding flight assignments. However, as to seniority for purposes of placement on the Flight Attendant Seniority list, which governs furloughs (layoffs) among other things, under the SIA former TWA Flight Attendants did not receive credit for time worked at TWA. Unfortunately, beginning with the effects of September 11 and continuing because of the deteriorating financial state of the airline industry in general and of American Airlines in particular, American Airlines has furloughed almost all of the former TWA Flight Attendants based on their American Airlines seniority.

The SIA was approved by the APFA Board of Directors on December 19, 2001. My predecessor as APFA President – who was not President at the time the SIA was negotiated – thoroughly researched SIA issues that arose and the APFA Board of Directors reaffirmed the SIA on February 16, 2008.

In the nearly eight years since the SIA was negotiated, some former TWA Flight Attendants have tried to “undo” the SIA, through, among other things, an unsuccessful federal court lawsuit.

In late 2007, APFA worked with Senator Claire McCaskill of Missouri on issues of concern to the former TWA Flight Attendants and, with her help, was able to get American Airlines to agree to the first of two extensions of recall rights for furloughed Flight Attendants. Moreover, Senator McCaskill spearheaded passage of a new law that in future airline mergers will ensure a process for determining how seniority lists are integrated. However, that law applies prospectively only and did not address, much less change, the seniority status of former TWA Flight Attendants. Presumably, Senator McCaskill understood the complexities of trying to revisit the seniority credit given to those Flight Attendants.

Since my administration took office in April 2008, APFA has worked hard and successfully to get a second two-year extension of recall rights for the furloughed Flight Attendants, to negotiate a Voluntary Bridge to Retirement and a Travel Separation package for all active and furloughed Flight Attendants. We continue to fight to preserve every job possible. Given the economy and state of the airline industry, this has been no easy task.

I sympathize with the TWA Flight Attendants. I started my career at American Airlines as a ticket agent. I transferred to Flight Attendants status, lost all of my occupational seniority, and was subsequently furloughed. We truly understand that the former TWA Flight Attendants want seniority credit for their dedicated years of service at TWA. However, this was not a matter for “negotiation” with them back in 2001 nor is it a matter for “renegotiation” now. Regardless of my personal views about the SIA, that agreement controls the seniority rights of the former TWA Flight Attendants.

Please understand that any change in the seniority rights of former TWA Flight Attendants would have to be ratified by the entire APFA membership. This is an insurmountable hurdle; the membership simply would not ratify such a change. A referendum on this question would mean that some Flight Attendants would be voting, in effect, to be furloughed in lieu of the former TWA Flight Attendants. In addition, we have many Flight Attendants in our ranks from bankrupt carriers including a number who made the decision to leave TWA and fly for American prior to American purchasing TWA. They would argue that they saw the handwriting on the wall, and if we are handing out seniority, they should be first in line.

Finally, APFA believes it is time to move forward, to continue to work to protect and promote the interests of all American Airlines Flight Attendants. I hope you can see by my lengthy response that this issue is far more complex than it appears on the surface— one that has the potential to affect the majority of our membership. I appreciate that you have taken the time to contact me with your concerns. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. I will be happy to discuss this matter further with you or any member of your staff.

Sincerely,

Laura R. Glading
APFA President