

# What Will It Take to Change the Direction of the FAA?

Paul Rinaldi, Executive Vice President



I was recently asked by reporter, "What is it going to take to change the direction of the FAA?"

Wow. Now THERE is a question. My initial humorous response was, "how much time do you have?" Unfortunately, the real answer isn't pretty, or funny.

We have already seen what has to happen the past eight years in order for the soon-to-be-former administration to take action, reverse its course and follow the rules to protect Americans across the country.

The most glaring example is the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). After years of cutting personnel and resources, we saw the abysmal relief effort for our citizens in need after Hurricane Katrina. The everlasting, infuriatingly sad sound bite from that disaster remains, from the president, "Brownie, you're doin' a heckuva job."

In addition, of course, we have seen the financial, banking and housing markets collapse. Our government's leaders have tripped all over themselves on this one. Yet now, taxpayers are going to pay trillions of dollars because of these agencies' complete failure.

One thing is clear: Once a government agency's failure begin affecting the American public in some very profound ways, the outrage and public pressure forces the administration to do the right thing. This appears to be the only way to change direction.

As for us in NATCA, we are fighting and wondering, what will it take? We know the FAA has fallen into a downward, completely out of control spiral. Public outrage over delays is exceeded only by our own outrage over inadequate staffing and declining morale. And if I have to read one more news story about how NextGen is the magic solution to all our problems, I'm going to scream in agony.

Same goes for the next time I hear from the FAA that, "safety was not compromised." As professionals in the aviation industry, we know that this statement will come to haunt the FAA in the same way that "Brownie" haunts FEMA.

The problem with waiting for true reckoning in this agency is that the unthinkable has to happen! We as safety professionals work every day preventing the unthinkable from happening and never want to be working when and if this should happen. Now, due to some ideologues in the administration and the FAA, the unthinkable has a higher probability of now happening because our margin for error has dwindled to almost nothing. Remain outraged that they are doing this to our profession!

Moreover, the real unfortunate thing is that the current leadership at the FAA – the career FAA managers – have no intention on changing direction. FAA headquarters management continue to make comments such as this: "Controllers make mistakes for one of two reasons; either they did it on purpose or they're not very good at their job. Either way, they should be disciplined as a result."

This mentality needs to be eradicated!

But in recent meetings with the FAA ATO COO and his VPs it became abundantly clear that the FAA has no plan for a U-turn. No, the current track has seen millions of taxpayer dollars wasted on fraudulent practices, unnecessary travel, unwarranted promotions and no real plan for NextGen, accompanied by a gross overstaffing of management and supervisor ranks.

I recently had a cocky ATO VP tell me that even in an Obama Administration, NATCA's issues are so low on his priority list that it will be years before they are forced to change direction.

My response was, "we are coming for you and we're coming hard!"

Here's what going to take years to change: The poison that management infected our work environment with.

With organizations such as FAAMA, whose only function is to make sure NATCA does not have a fair chance at the negotiating table, the FAA management has certainly drawn the line of demarcation between us and them.

- FAA management has received pay raises over the last two years and we have not!

- FAA management has taken all of its vacation time (most during the summer) over the last two years and we have not.

- FAA management has been able to leave the facility to get lunch and we are not.

So, let's get back to that reporter's question about what is it going to take for the FAA to change its direction. The housing market crumbled and \$200 billion dollars was issued to help the problem. The banking industry collapsed and the stock market crashed and \$700 billion was sent to the rescue. Will it take the unthinkable to happen in order to change the FAA? I certainly hope not!

Recently, we have heard the announcement of the retirements of two top FAA officials, Nick Sabatini and Ruth Leverenz. That's a good start, but we must see more of these officials move along. They have served their purpose of trying to destroy the safest most efficient air traffic control system in the world.

The real change will come when the individuals in charge of this mess step aside so that people with morals, integrity and the intestinal fortitude to do the right thing take control and get back to a collaborative work environment built on respect. Then and only then will we be able to look to the future and start repairing the damage, to ensure the safest, most efficient air traffic control system in the world.

Brothers and sisters, stay safe, stay focused and stay united!  
Our Collective Spirit is their Enemy!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul M. Rinaldi".