

# EVP Paul Rinaldi: “Stand tall, stand proud and don’t let them divide us!”

*(The following is a complete transcript of NATCA Executive Vice President Paul Rinaldi’s speech to NATCA in Washington. Paul’s speech was preceded by a video presentation featuring the song, “Streetcorner Symphony,” by Rob Thomas.)*

I don’t know if you had an opportunity to listen to the words of that song but when I drive in to work in the morning — sometimes it can take up to three hours to go 33 miles — I get to listen to songs over and over again and the words of that song were just perfect. “Come on over, come to the corner, my Sisters and my Brothers, hold tight, things are gonna be alright, trying to make a better life, we will make it through somehow. Here and now this is our time. I truly believe it.”

I truly do believe here and now this is our time. Those words together with those pictures of our activists, of all the hard work that they have done throughout the year to get where we are today, is priceless. It’s almost like they wrote the song for us.

I want to start off by thanking you — thanking you for your energy and your passion for our organization and for our profession. You are the lifeline to this organization and I truly cannot think what NATCA would be without its activists. Thank you very much.

The new kids in here, you might not know it yet but you are a member of the greatest union on earth. You truly are.

I can’t thank you enough for taking that leap of faith and joining us because, truth be told, there’s a deal that we could have had and we could have sold you out. But there is no deal because we don’t believe in the A and B scale and we don’t believe in selling out the next generation of air traffic controllers. We just don’t do that.

I would be remiss if I didn’t take a moment to acknowledge the greatest group of activists I have ever worked with. I have

worked NATCA issues on every front, from LR to safety to arbitrations, but the greatest group of activists, who work on their own time and their own dime, is your National Legislative Committee. Under the leadership of Trish Gilbert, this committee is awesome. It’s unbelievable, they rock. They truly rock!

Alright, let’s get into it. You heard Jimmy’s talk — “It’s all about relationships.” It truly is. It’s about that human relationship that you need to develop with your Congressperson, with your Senator, with Ed Schultz, whoever it is — tell them your story. Our story is passionate. Our story has meaning. Our story is good. We are the side of righteous; they are the side of bad. We stand up for safety; they stand up for the bottom dollar. Tell them your story, build that relationship, build their trust. With their trust you can make your concerns known. You can become the air traffic control expert for them. They will rely on you, just as Ed calls me every time he thinks there’s something going on in the system. He doesn’t listen to some knucklehead from the FAA. He listens to NATCA members and that’s priceless.

When you’re viewed as the expert, you have the avenue to get your voice heard, because, believe it or not, in D.C., as corrupt as this government is, there is a stamp of approval on anything a government agency says and I just don’t get it. Weapons of mass destruction — let’s go to war and nobody calls him out on it. It’s all about tax cuts — we need a tax cut, we need this to keep the economy growing, yet we are heading for a recession — and nobody calls them out on the facts or follows up for the truth. The government says something is automatically true and we have to prove them to be untruthful. So when you develop these relationships with your Congressmen and women and Senators you let them know, “I’m the expert,” and “I’m going to tell you the truth.” Because at the end of the day, the only thing we care about is the safety of the National Airspace System. We’re built on the integrity of maintaining the safest and most efficient air traffic control system in the world. That’s what we stand for — simple, plain, that’s it.

It’s not about a bottom dollar for us. It’s not about anything other than the safety of the system. Develop those personal relationships with the members of Congress and their staff; bring the human element into it. Get to know their family and get them to know your family. Let them know your kids’ names and let them know you just had a baby. If they just had a baby, or a staff person just had a baby, send them a card. Let them know that you’re thinking of them. With that human element, I assure you that they won’t want to vote against you — and they want to help you. When they get to



NATCA Executive Vice President Paul Rinaldi

know you, they love you and that's priceless.

Jim Marinitti and Mitch Herrick have done a phenomenal job of developing these grassroots relationships at the local level. They're dealing with people who really don't like us. They're building relationships with some very tough Rs in South Florida, including Mr. Mica and you know he doesn't like Pat and I. He'll say "No, we'll take care of the local guys but, those national guys – keep them away from our office." That's great because at the end of the day, I don't care who gets the credit, I just need that relationship so they don't abuse us. And you know what? They don't hate us that much anymore which is good – it's very good. They aren't getting a dollar of our PAC, though – I can tell you that right now.

There's a lot of activists in this union that have great relationships. And, quite frankly, that's how we got HR2881 – by those human relationships. HR2881 is an awesome bill and it is off those great relationships that we got what we got. It's a great piece of legislation. You know, it's just as simple as this – the House has done its job and they have done it well. When you go and you hit that Hill and you meet with that Congressperson who voted with us on 2881 and on the Costello Amendment, you let them know – thank you! Thank you for supporting us, thank you for supporting the safety of the National Airspace System. And if they didn't vote for us, and they truly didn't understand us, or if they have some excuse such as "Well, those PFCs were getting too high, and the taxes – I can't vote for something that increases taxes..." you let them know, make that nexus to personal relationship first and then second, make the bridge to the economy.

Everybody in this town is talking about the economy so make that bridge. Let them know – you need to support this bill because this bill supports the economy. The House has done its job and the House has done its job well. Safety is stalled in the Senate. It's as plain and as simple as that. I talked about the numbers earlier – no matter how you slice it up its 49-49, one Senator had a stroke and has been out for a year, and another Senator is an Independent, who caucuses with the Democrats, who doesn't know who he is. He says he's a Democrat but then he endorsed John McCain for President. Senate rules state that we need 60 Senators to move legislation, that's why everything seems to stall in the Senate. The numbers just aren't there! The Senate needs to do its job. You have to bridge those relationships. You have to tell your Congressman to get the Senate to do their job. You have to tell your Senators to get the Senate to do their job. They cannot be responsible for the system falling.

I have a lot of theories for why we're in this battle and I won't bore you with all of them but I will talk about the one I really believe in. It's all about control and it's all about undoing reclass. I'll talk about the control piece for just one second. They

always had control – FAA managers, supervisors, and headquarters always had the control. The problem is that they were lazy and hid behind the green book.

Now, undoing reclass. Jane Garvey, the greatest administrator this agency has ever had, made a clear line of demarcation of who would get the reclass and who wouldn't get the reclass. If you worked airplanes, if you worked in a facility that worked airplanes, staff, operational supervisors, managers, ops managers, that line was there and you got reclass. Whether it was right, wrong or indifferent, that was the rule. The people in headquarters and the people in the regional offices, she felt that the GS system was appropriate and that they were not in the active moving of airplanes and the core mission of the FAA, she didn't give them reclass.

Well, guess who didn't get reclass? You want to take a guess? The architects of the imposed work rules did not get reclass. They didn't and they valued reclass at 30 percent. Sound familiar? Yeah. You know the architects that I'm talking about – the Joe Miniaces, the Rick Ducharmes, the Bruce Johnsons, Rick Days, Russ Chew, Bobby Sturgell and Marion Blakey, those people. Those are the people that are destroying the air traffic control system, make no mistake about it.

I wonder if when they drew up the imposed work rules if they realized that by attacking the air traffic control profession, attacking fair collective bargaining and pure common sense that they would get the nightmare scenario which has happened to them. And it is their nightmare that's about to unfold on their watch. It's nothing because of us. We're doing everything to stop it. It is their nightmare.

The creators of the imposed work rules did not realize that destroying the air traffic control profession, on their petty little vengeance on getting even on reclass, that they would destroy the safest, most efficient air traffic control system in the world. They had no idea. They're that incompetent!

They never foresaw the mass retirements; they took us for granted. We had 911 retirements last year and over 400 of them retired in their first year of eligibility. Some went on their first day; they put their paperwork in and said, "I'm out of here." It's absolutely unheard of. We used to work until our kids were out of college, we'd paid off our house and we had turned 56 and they made us walk out the door. Now it's the first day and we're gone. It's absolutely unbelievable and they didn't ever see it coming. They also didn't foresee that the CTI students that are on the list, that have waited two, three, four, five years, saying, "Thank you but no! I don't want the job anymore." They never saw it. 417 out of 483 in the Eastern Terminal Service Area told the FAA to go pound sand. No thank you!

[Continued on page 6](#)

They never predicted that 201 of the new hires last year would say, “You know what, I’m out of here, I don’t need this. I’ll go tar roofs or wait tables or do whatever I have to do. I’m not doing this, not for this money, not with this stress and not for these hours – not to be treated this way.” They never saw that coming. We already had 80 of them do it this year already, since October 1st, and it’s climbing every day. The new hires in this system had their pay cut by 30 percent, they’re sitting in limbo in training for years and can’t get pay increases.

They never calculated that the new hires have to get two and three jobs to make ends meet. I’m sure some of the new kids here have two jobs, sometimes three. In Washington Center, right down the street, there are nine areas of expertise. Developmentals, when they’re working seven to three, work in area one through eight. When they’re done on their three o’clock shift they go and work in area nine. Area nine is TGI Fridays in Leesburg, Virginia. They wait tables, bus tables and wash dishes. They make ends meet.

There are controllers I met at Fort Worth Center. I was talking to them and I said, “What do you do after work?” They said, “Well I go to the hotel and I park cars. I valet cars.” No offense to the valets of America, I don’t want you working my airplanes. I want my air traffic controllers resting. I don’t want them parking cars to make ends meet. It’s as simple as that.

We have a controller up at Potomac TRACON – I’ve met her a couple of times. She works airplanes during the day shift, she works a night shift at Bed, Bath & Beyond in Manassas, Virginia and tutors kids in mathematics and science in between shifts. Think she has any free time? Think she’s tired? You think they saw this coming? They didn’t because I asked Bruce Johnson that question. “Did you realize they have to get extra jobs to pay their bills?” He said, “I lived with 30 percent less all these years, they should be able to do it.”

There’s a controller at Santa Barbara Tower who lives in a condo complex not too far away. He has to cut the lawn to offset the rent so that he can live close to work. He does the maintenance and cuts the grass. Think he’s getting rest in between shifts? Whether it’s working at Home Depot, cutting lawns, tarring roofs, parking cars, waiting tables, or becoming a teacher (as a couple have done that), the minute the new hires find a job that pays better and one where they’re treated nicer at work, they take it. Do you blame them? I don’t blame them at all.

So here we are; We’ve got a severe staffing shortage right now, the lowest level of certified controllers in fifteen years. We have controllers working more airplanes, they’re on position longer with less breaks. The new hires, the ones who are supposed to have all the energy and who are supposed to be able to go a longer time on position because they’re young, strong and

vibrant are working at two or three jobs. I give you an air traffic control system with a severe fatigue problem. The NTSB can talk about it all they want, it’s about safety – it’s about our contract. Because they wouldn’t have to work two or three jobs if we had our contract. It’s just that simple.

So, the architects of the imposed work rules, they did what they did. “Vengeance will bring back re-class. I lived with 30 percent less all these years, so will the air traffic controllers. I’m not giving them another increase.” And what have you got? Delays are at an all-time high and are getting worse. The staffing crisis is horrible and is getting worse. The controllers working the system are severely fatigued and safety is being compromised on a regular basis. The air traffic control system is in a downward spiral, it is unraveling fast and I see no end in sight except S.1300.

The FAA knows they’re in trouble. They talk to Pat and I all the time and they want to know, “What can we do?” That’s what all these Band-Aids are about – all these offers that come back and forth. Quite frankly, some of them are so insulting that we don’t even let you know what they are – that is how bad they are. But they keep throwing these Band-Aids at us, hoping something’s gonna stick. Sometimes we don’t even respond to their offers it’s a complete joke. They know they’re in trouble. They just can’t help themselves! They can’t do the right thing cause if doing the right thing is to go back to the green book then in their eyes they’ve admitted complete failure. They did fail but they’re afraid to admit it. They have failed, the system is failing.

So, where are we? And why do I think they know they’re in trouble and they can’t do the right thing? Well, I offer you the per diem issue and the promotional back pay issue. These are issues that we beat them up on at the Hill. These are issues that we beat them up on in the press. These are issues that we’re going to beat them up on in arbitrations with promotional back pay. They knew they had to fix it but, nobody up in FAA headquarters from Johnson to Day to Miniace to Ducharme, none of them would do the right thing! They said, “I’m not signing that. That means we wronged everyone else in the Academy and didn’t give them per diem. I’m not going to be responsible for that.” Then, in walks Hank Krakowski and there’s two letters prepared for him to sign – “Here Hank as your first act, sign these two letters,” the others said. So he did – not knowing what he was getting himself into when he signs these two letters. Bobby and the others went, “Whew, we fixed that problem.” No you didn’t. It’s just another Band-Aid. And the problem is still there.

And now, what’s their next Band-Aid? They’re going to offer \$24,000 to the controllers that have retired. “Come back, work under these imposed work rules. We’re not going to treat you like those scummy air traffic controllers; we’re going to treat you like a rehired annuitant. We’re going to let you pick your days off, we’re going to let you pick your schedule, you can come in

part time and work whatever you want to work.” It is clear desperation. And another sign that the system is in trouble!

There are simple steps the FAA can take to stop the controllers from retiring immediately and they’re pretty simple: Pay us correctly, treat us fairly and with respect, go back to the green book and when we reach a ratified agreement, let us vote on it. Those are pretty simple.

Creating this C-scale, using stolen money from our newest NATCA members and from our lost annual raises from our long-standing NATCA members, is an insult to our profession, and is blood money, pure and simple. I do not advocate anybody taking them up on this attempt to camouflage the weakness and the vulnerabilities of this system. This is complete nonsense.

You all must stand together; insist on fair pay, fair treatment and a true collective bargaining process. Reject this next attempt that they’re coming out with to divide this union, to bust us in half by divide and conquer. It’s just another Band-Aid that they’re putting on the system that’s hemorrhaging with problems. They’re thinking, “I know, we just chased all these guys away and we’re going to bring them back in with \$24,000.” They think you’re that cheap?

Ask your Senator, immediately, when you see them, and ask your Congressperson, when you see them, to ask their Senators to help us ensure we keep the safest, most efficient air traffic control system in the world. Tell your Senators that S.1300 has to move and has to move now. It seems like everyone cares about stimulating the economy. It’s all they’re talking about. The market crashes a couple of days and all of a sudden there’s the typical, quintessential knee-jerk reaction from the government – “Oh, recession, recession. Here we are on the verge of a recession!” Well, let’s make sure you don’t go into a recession. Keep the air traffic control system strong. The aviation economy produces \$900 billion dollars a year or nine percent of the gross domestic product and has 11 million jobs. Delays alone last year had a negative impact of \$15 billion dollars on the economy.

It’s pretty simple – are you really concerned about the economy? Then you should be concerned about S.1300 because that’ll help the economy from going into a recession.

Tell your Senator and your Congressman to tell his Senator that the FAA knows they’re in trouble and they need them to do the

right thing. They need someone to help them do the right thing because they can’t help themselves!

I stand before you as your executive vice president very proud. I am so very proud of you, of your members in your facilities, in the field, and of the new kids in the Academy. Pat and I go out there once a month. I’m very proud to be your executive vice president because at the end of the day we’ve taken a direct hit from the big bully – the FAA. They smacked us in the face, they punched us in the nose, they’ve taken money out of our pockets, and they destroyed our work environment and everything we

believe in. We have all been equally wronged, every facet of our organization. It doesn’t matter if you have five months in, five years, 15 years or five days left to retire, you are angry with their arbitrary, capricious and hateful ways. Yet, what have we done?

We have pulled together, we are bigger and stronger, we stand taller, we’re richer with more resolve, and more unity than ever and the FAA is not sure what to

do with us. They thought for sure they would have broken us by now. Not a chance – they were wrong again. You will never break the spirit of this union.

As Jane Garvey drew that line of clear demarcation with, there is a new line in the sand; there is a clear line between us and them. And if you ever thought, “Oh they’re not so bad; they’re just doing what they have to do.” No. There is a clear line between us and them. The roles are defined. We’re unified, we’re unafraid, we are the epitome of professionalism, we are NATCA and we will not be beat!

As the song opened with that phrase, “Here and now this is our time!” I know we can make things happen this week. I truly believe that. S.1300 is our tomorrow, S.1300 will turn everything around and S.1300 is everything. We have the reason, we have the will and we have the resolve. Let’s make a stand for our profession, for our career, for our family and for our future. We are NATCA. United we will not be beat.

Brothers and sisters, we are NATCA. Stand tall, stand proud and don’t let them divide us. Here and now it’s our time! S.1300 right now! Thank you.

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