



SOUTHWEST AIRLINES ANXIOUSLY AWAITS CONTRACT RATIFICATION VOTE BY THOUSANDS OF ITS PILOTS

News / Airlines



The fate of Southwest [Airlines'](#) tentative agreement with its pilots union now is in the hands of more than 8,000 pilots who are members of the Southwest Airlines Pilots' Association (SWAPA), the union that represents the low fare behemoth's pilots.

The SWAPA rank and file include some 1,100 Southwest Airlines pilots domiciled in Chicago, the largest of 10 Southwest pilot domiciles. Chicago's Midway Airport also is Southwest's largest hub.

But in an unusual turn of events late last week, the 23-member SWAPA executive board decided to present the tentative contract to rank and file pilots without the executive board's first voting up or down on it.

According to sources familiar with developments, it's unusual, though not entirely unprecedented, for a union executive board to present a tentative contract without first voting on it themselves.

Noted a SWAPA spokesman: "I've seen it both ways. Sometimes they (the exec board) believe strongly and endorse or reject. Sometimes they want to stay neutral and not sway outside of just presenting the facts."

Added SWAPA President and Southwest Captain Paul Jackson: "Ultimately the positives and negatives of any deal will affect the lives of our membership. We believe it should be up to the members and their families to decide for themselves if this agreement meets their expectation."

Speaking of the three long years of negotiating that led to the tentative agreement, Jackson said: "This process has been a long and sometimes frustrating three years for our negotiators, but we are not done yet."

The tentative deal runs through Apr. 1, 2019 and provides pay rate increases for pilots that are said to be commensurate with pay scales at similar major domestic carriers. The tentative deal also includes increases in company contributions toward retirement and other work rule improvements.

But are the Southwest Airlines pilots in a mood to ratify the proposed contract on which the union's executive board declined to vote?

One source familiar with developments said pilots had become "livid" in recent months because of Southwest management's efforts to do a deal with JetBlue that was a variation on code sharing.

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