

# Alaska Airlines flight attendants to vote on second sellout contract deal

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*Alaska flight attendants: Tell us how you're voting on this tentative agreement and why by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.*

More than two years after contract negotiations began, the Association of Flight Attendants (AFA) has announced a vote on the latest tentative agreement (TA) reached by the union leadership and Alaska Airlines.

Rank-and-file workers soundly rejected the previous TA in August by a vote of 68 percent, with a high turnout of 94 percent of the 6,900 flight attendants in the bargaining unit. Flight attendants cited “poverty-level wages,” building up unsustainable debt and scrambling to make rent as reasons to vote down the agreement that did not address their concerns.

The AFA bureaucracy hailed the August TA as a “record” deal, with AFA President and Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) member Sara Nelson telling *Forbes* that the agreement was “leading the industry.” At the time, voting was opened on the TA before the contract language was even finalized, angering workers who called for a postponement of the vote until they could see the final details.

At the time, the company was offering a 15 percent wage increase with 2 percent raises each year over four years. Accounting for 20 percent inflation since 2019, however, the offer equated to only a 1 percent raise above pre-pandemic wages.

The latest TA is essentially unchanged, with base pay seeing only minimal increases for flight attendants with over 13 years of seniority. Flight attendants currently receive no boarding pay, meaning they work for free while performing critical safety and preparatory tasks during passenger boarding. The new TA provides a marginal amount of boarding pay which would slightly benefit only more junior flight attendants, who tend to work shorter routes and thus have more boardings.

Voting will begin on February 11 and close on February 18, giving workers a week to decide whether to ratify the contract. The AFA fully backs the new TA and expects the membership to vote to approve it, despite the agreement

being nearly the same as before with only a new coat of paint.

Flight attendant workers should once again rally for the rejection of the tentative agreement at Alaska Airlines. The fact that the AFA is presenting an agreement that is for all purposes the same as the one workers voted down in August is a slap in the face and a betrayal to the rank and file who desperately need significant raises.

With this proposal, the AFA is siding with the company on the issue of maximizing profits and minimizing wages. To achieve their necessary demands, flight attendant workers will need to override their own union and insist on a contract with adequate pay and working conditions.

Flight attendants must carry their struggle forward in rebellion against the corporate flunkies in the AFA apparatus. This means forming rank-and-file committees to enforce democratic decision-making, countermanning actions which violate their will and providing workers with a platform to discuss and plan actions they deem necessary.

The union bureaucrats anticipate the rebellious rank and file to fold from the pressure of this being the last chance to vote on a proposal before fresh bargaining begins in April, for a combined contract covering both Alaska Airlines and Hawaiian Airlines flight attendants following a merger between the two entities.

The Alaska contract, if approved, would provide a baseline for negotiating an agreement covering 6,900 Alaska Airlines and 2,200 Hawaiian Airlines flight attendants. The union bureaucracy sees the ratification of this TA as a way to grease the wheels to ram the next contract through without significant worker resistance in April.

Taylor Garland, spokesperson for the AFA, puffed up the new agreement when he said it “addresses issues identified by members, puts in place significant economic gains, and provides the foundation we need for a second bite of the apple in this merger.”

Christina Frees, a Seattle-based flight attendant who has worked for Alaska for 13 years said she expects the agreement to pass this time under the pressure even though it

is “not an overall improvement at all.”

“They put us in between a rock and a hard place. I do believe it’s likely to be ratified because the cost of living is high and the pay is so bad,” Frees said. “We have to get the increase in pay, otherwise we sit for another two to three years waiting for a merger contract.”

Thresia Raynor, a flight attendant based in Anchorage, Alaska with over 17 years of experience said that rank-and-file union members “are all fully aware of the consequences of turning it down this time.” She repeated the coercive hope dangled in front of members by the union bureaucracy when she said, “It’s the only deal we are going to get, with the hope of more gains later in the joint collective bargaining agreement” with the Hawaiian flight attendants.

The AFA union is using this “ticking clock” pressure against their own membership in order to ram through the same sellout agreement as before with only token changes. The union bureaucracy is only interested in securing their own positions and cozy relationships with the company management and politicians who have a vested stake in securing a subpar agreement.

The Alaska Airlines and Hawaiian Airlines merger will also trigger a union election for new leadership. The president, vice president and secretary-treasurer will be selected using a highly undemocratic process. Eight voting members will be responsible for choosing the slate, six local presidents from Alaska bases and two from Hawaiian bases. Two out of eight of these individuals will be candidates seeking election, which is a huge conflict of interest. Rank-and-file union members will be allowed to vote for candidates who essentially chose themselves for the bureaucratic leadership roles.

The AFA stands by its undemocratic farce of an election process, claiming it provides equal representation for smaller bases such as San Diego. In practice, the system allows a small clique to maintain control over the union bureaucracy.

A proposal was made during the AFA board of directors convention in Atlanta last May to amend the bylaws to allow a democratic full membership vote for leadership positions, but the same small clique used their exclusive voting rights to swiftly kill the proposal.

Despite the costly impending merger with Hawaiian Airlines and a rough start to 2024, Alaska Airlines raked in record profits this last year. Passenger levels rose even higher than pre-pandemic counts in 2024 and Alaska rode the air traffic boom along with the rest of the major US airlines.

Alaska Air Group reported a net 2024 profit of \$395 million compared to \$235 million in 2023. Alaska ended the year with a positive cash flow of \$949 million, despite spending \$659 million on the merger with Hawaiian Airlines

and \$1.3 billion on aircraft and equipment. Alaska projects the Hawaiian merger will increase their pretax profits by \$1 billion over the next three years. Delta Airlines similarly reported \$3.5 billion in net profits and United Airlines \$3.1 billion in 2024.

In a recent earnings call, Alaska Air Group CEO Ben Minicucci said he “couldn’t be happier that we reached an agreement in concept” with the AFA. Boasting about the airline’s “outstanding financial performance,” he said he looks forward to the April joint negotiations after the merger.

By way of contrast with the thriving corporate profits, in 2023, Alaska flight attendants set up a private Facebook page called “Alaska Airlines FAs experiencing hunger and homelessness.” In this group, workers share their stories of poverty and are able to receive financial help through Venmo and tips about where to find free food in the cities where the airline operates.

Rebecca Owens is one of the group’s founders along with fellow Anchorage-based flight attendant Thresia Raynor. “When you go to work, you see all these bright shining faces. We’re known for that, right?” Owens said. “You don’t see the difficulty that people are facing. Oftentimes it’s actually hidden because people feel so ashamed.”

“We needed somewhere that people can finally talk about it so that nobody is struggling alone anymore,” she said.

The “last chance” pressure tactics used by the union bureaucracy should be seen for what they are, a collusion with the company to ram through an insulting contract against the wishes of the membership. To prepare a struggle against both Alaska Airlines and the AFA bureaucracy, flight attendants should organize rank-and-file committees which will provide the means to link up with workers in other airline companies and separate industries to receive and provide support in the fight for workers’ common interests.



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