

south of DFW. Although weather precluded flying over a few of the destinations, the banner scored a hit with controllers.

Five weeks later, their sentiments were quantified when the government tallied ballots from 86 percent of the work force. Seventy percent approved NATCA as their exclusive bargaining agent. The new union, formed while President Reagan still occupied the White House, allowed air traffic controllers to reclaim their voice in the workplace and provided organized labor with a much-needed comeback victory.

John Leyden, the longtime president of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization who was ousted in a coup before the strike, believes the achievement is a testament to the FAA and labor in general. “If you could have a union—like the phoenix—rebuilt, it was a great sign for the need for unions,” he says.

### A Walk in the Woods

Eleven years later, in early July 1998, four people gathered around a table in a Montréal hotel conference room. NATCA President Michael McNally and his predecessor, Barry Krasner, sat on one side. FAA Administrator Jane Garvey and Tony Herman, a high-powered Washington, D.C., attorney, faced

them on the other side.

The 20-minute meeting, aimed at closing the deal on the union’s third contract with the agency, represented the culmination of a momentous journey. The groundwork for this gathering included eighteen months of bargaining preparations and talks, an exhaustive seven-year project to reclassify all air traffic control facility rankings and their accompanying salary scales, and a concerted legislative effort by the union that enabled NATCA and the FAA to abandon the traditional government compensation schedule and negotiate pay.

This crowning achievement would shortly put the federal-sector union and its employer in the ranks of a very select group that included such agencies as the U.S. Postal Service and Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.

At issue this morning was the amount of money the FAA would pay 15,000 controllers under the new facility classification system. McNally and Herman haggled over millions of dollars while Krasner and Garvey observed in silence. Finally, Herman offered \$200 million.

The two NATCA negotiators briefly consulted before McNally turned to the administrator and said, “You’ve got a deal, Jane.”

NATCA’s five-year contract with the agency resulted in substantial pay raises for controllers. More

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— Former PATCO President  
John Leyden