

Response to CrankyFlier.com, re: Southwest purchase of larger aircraft
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Brett,

The press release issued by TWU Local 556 opens with “The members of the flight attendants union are excited about the possibilities that the addition of new, larger, longer-range aircraft could mean for both our company and the customers we serve,” and we mean exactly what we said. You, on the other hand, opined that Southwest Airlines flight attendants were trying to block the purchase of the new aircraft with “demands” and our reaction was “ridiculous”. You failed to mention that we are also required to uphold the contract that has been agreed to by Southwest Airlines and TWU Local 556 and ratified by our members. Our contract states:

Article 26.6 6. The basic Agreement shall be reopened for the purpose of negotiating rates of pay, rules and working conditions in the event that the Company places into service an aircraft other than the Boeing 737-200/300/500/600/700, or institutes meal service or international flights. Either party will give the other a sixty (60) day notice of intention to reopen the Agreement, unless a shorter period is mutually agreed upon. Notice to reopen hereunder shall be given in accordance with Section 6, Title I of the Railway Labor Act, as amended.

Two weeks ago, when our union was approached by Southwest Airlines to discuss acquiring the 737-800, we immediately and mutually agreed to waive the 60 days so that we could meet the time restraints required to allow the company to move forward. We reassembled our previous negotiating team since putting a new one in place under our bylaw requirements would have taken months. We also agreed on meeting dates and have already exchanging ideas about what should be opened choosing to focus only on those items which relate to acquiring the 737-800 series aircraft. In addition, flight attendants and our Safety Coordinator have also met with Southwest Airlines to discuss and make suggestions over galley and cabin design. It seems that if we were trying to block anything, we simply could have not agreed with Southwest Airlines to move forward expeditiously.

You are certainly entitled to your view that a new, larger aircraft, with new safety and technical requirements, a larger number of passengers, additional training, and an additional flight attendant does require any opening our contract to negotiate rates of pay, rules and working conditions, but agreement with Southwest Airlines requires it. Our union and our company take honoring our commitments very seriously.

You seem to be troubled by the fact that we put out a press release and the timing of its release. We coordinated with the company and our pilots union to release the information at the same time. I don't know why SWA and SWAPA did not issue a press release however I do know that SWA did do an investor relations release. TWU Local 556 did a news release that was almost identical to our member communication as a public sign of support and to eliminate speculation on where we stood. You seem to believe that we should have waited until after we

had an agreement to announce our intent to acquire bigger planes. Whether or not this process is newsworthy is obviously up to your judgment as a professional journalist, however we have often publicly supported moves by our company that we believe are in the best interest of our members and our customers. We take great pride in our labor/management relations and try to do our part to maintain that relationship.

In addition to saying that we are excited about this opportunity, we also stated “Our union supports the expansion and growth of Southwest Airlines.” and, “If we are able to come to agreement, we hope that this new chapter in the story of Southwest Airlines will bring new opportunities and continued success for us all.” These don’t sound like statements from a labor group trying to block anything.

In the future, should you decide to write about a statement issued by our organization, we would appreciate it if you would to inform your readers what we actually said, in addition to whatever interpretation you might have. If you are unsure of the meaning or intent, please feel free to contact us and we will clarify it for you. This is especially important when your interpretation – that we are making “demands” in an effort to “block” Southwest’s purchase of new aircraft – is the exact opposite of what we actually said.

Sincerely,
Thom McDaniel, President
TWU Local 556
Representing Flight Attendants at Southwest Airlines

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