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United Airlines Flight Attendants Union Files Grievance to Prevent Cuts to Retiree Health Care

Cuts Constitute “Unlawful Unilateral Change” in the Existing Contract

CHICAGO — The United Airlines Master Executive Council of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, AFL-CIO, filed a grievance last night for an expedited hearing to stop airline management from unlawfully seeking to impose devastating cuts to retiree medical benefits by unilaterally changing the agreement reached between the parties in the spring of 2003.

United management signed a letter of agreement in May 2003 to ensure that Flight Attendants retiring before July 1, 2003 would have access to health care benefits that were less costly and more comprehensive than those that would be in place for those who retire after that date.

Over 2,500 Flight Attendants retired before the July 1 deadline believing their medical benefits were protected. United is now seeking to slash the medical benefits for those retirees by exploiting Section 1114 of the bankruptcy code despite the airline's return to profitability. The cuts are not necessary for United's successful reorganization.

“We will employ every legal means necessary to stop United management's attempt to make 2,500 loyal employees become dupes of management's dishonesty” said AFA United MEC President Greg Davidowitch. “United management's attack on these workers will cause incredible harm to these retirees who are now surviving on the fixed, modest pension of a Flight Attendant.

“The sacrifices of front-line employees and recent retirees are the reason United has begun to return to profitability,” Davidowitch said. “Cooperation among management and workers is the only way for our carrier to successfully navigate the bankruptcy process. For the sake of our airline, I sincerely hope management sees the value of abandoning this ill-conceived plan before it hurts thousands of long-time employees.”

Text of the grievance and the letter of agreement United signed with AFA, promising access to low-cost, comprehensive health care for those who retired before July 1, 2003 can be viewed at <http://www.unitedafa.org>. AFA has also reserved its right to pursue other legal remedies, if necessary.

More than 46,000 flight attendants, including the 21,000 flight attendants at United, join together to form AFA, the world's largest flight attendant union. AFA is part of the 700,000 member strong Communications Workers of America, AFL-CIO. Visit us at www.unitedafa.org.

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