

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 12, 2024

Deirdre Hamilton, Chair
Linda A. Puchala, Member
Loren Sweatt, Member
National Mediation Board
1301 K Street, NW, Suite 250 East
Washington, DC 20005-7011

Dear Chair Hamilton, Member Puchala, and Member Sweatt:

We write with deep concern about the number of ongoing and prolonged contract negotiations before the National Mediation Board (NMB or “the Board”). As tens of thousands of workers across the country are being unfairly subjected to prolonged contract negotiations, we urge you to use all the tools at your disposal to resolve these negotiations as soon as possible.

As you know, the Railway Labor Act charged the NMB with facilitating the “prompt and orderly settlement of all disputes,” including bargaining. In addition, the task given to the NMB is also uniquely urgent. Unlike workers covered by the National Labor Relations Act, workers covered by the Railway Labor Act do not possess the right to strike or engage in any other form of “self-help” without a formal vote by the Board. The ability to strike is not just a fundamental right: it is a critical component of achieving fair contracts in a timely manner. Workers across the country won groundbreaking new contracts in recent years, many of which were won due to workers’ ability to strike.

Fortunately, with the NMB’s assistance, most negotiations reach an agreement, reflecting the professionalism and hard work of the Board and your staff.

However, we are concerned about the increasing number of contract negotiations before the NMB that are being unnecessarily drawn out at the expense of workers. We understand that there are ongoing negotiations that have dragged on for as long as five years and we have heard from workers who are rightfully frustrated that they are being subjected to unfair delays in bargaining. Without new contracts, these workers are left further and further behind rising costs of living while airline carriers make record-breaking profits.

In particular, over 100,000 flight attendants have recently been or currently are stuck in contract negotiations with many working under contracts that expired several years ago. Earlier this year, tens of thousands of flight attendants around the world rallied to demand fair contracts from six airlines. These workers were on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic and were instrumental in saving the airline industry from collapse, but now, in some cases, find themselves working for pre-pandemic wage levels. They deserve better.

Unfortunately, it seems airline carriers do not feel pressured to reach agreements quickly, likely because the flight attendants’ ability to strike has rarely been allowed to be exercised. Since 2006, the NMB has only released airline workers to strike twice—most recently, Spirit Airlines

Pilots in 2010—compared to dozens of instances in the 1980s and 1990s. We are concerned that this fact has contributed to the present pattern of unending negotiations and that many carriers are taking advantage of the situation.

Therefore, we join with our 178 colleagues in the House to urge the Board to use all of the tools at your disposal, including releasing parties from mediation as necessary, to resolve these long-pending contract negotiations.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your prompt response.

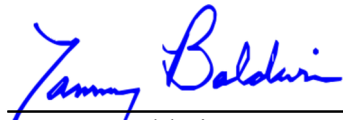
Sincerely,



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator
Chairman, Committee on
Health, Education, Labor, and
Pensions



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Raphael Butler
United States Senator



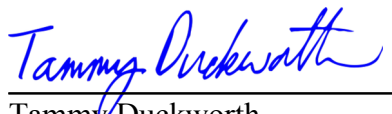
Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



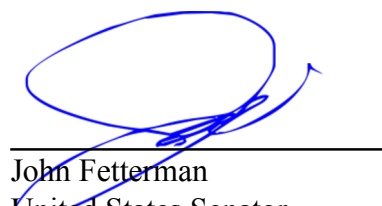
Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



John Fetterman
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



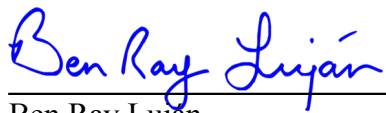
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



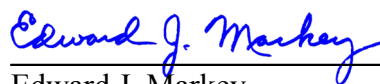
Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



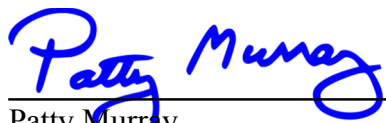
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



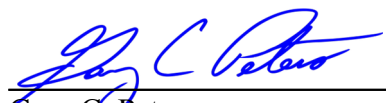
Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



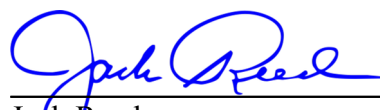
Patty Murray
United States Senator



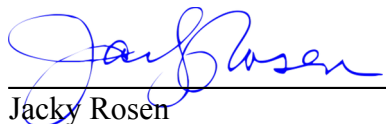
Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Tina Smith
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Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



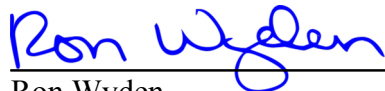
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Peter Welch
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator