



Transportation NewsWire

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Transportation Department Meets With Obama Transition Team

General Vice President Robert Roach, Jr. and staff from the IAM Transportation, Legal, Legislative and Strategic Resources Departments met this week with members of President-elect Barack Obama's transition team at the headquarters of the National Mediation Board (NMB) in Washington, DC. The board oversees labor relations in the air transport and railroad industries.

GVP Roach shared his concerns about recent NMB rulings that eliminated union representation for workers without their consent. Roach also detailed examples of excessive carrier interference in union organizing campaigns and prolonged contract negotiations in the air and rail industries.

"After eight years of anti-worker decisions, IAM members have high expectations for the Mediation Board under President Obama," said Roach, who also addressed staffing at the Board. "Beginning in 2009, we will have several major negotiations underway. The NMB must be properly staffed to ensure negotiations are not delayed due to a lack of mediators."

An open seat on the three-member NMB is being filled temporarily by an appointee named by President Bush. GVP Roach emphasized the importance of appointing someone who is fair toward employees and giving the Board sufficient resources to protect workers. President-elect Obama's Team indicated it could take more than six months after he takes office before the open seat is filled.

The meeting with the Obama Transition Team followed a meeting with staff from the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO). The GAO is surveying airline industry stakeholders to determine how the industry is responding to the nation's latest economic crisis.

GVP Roach expressed particular concern over workers' retirement security, given the growing economic pressure on the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC), which insures defined benefit pension plans. The instability of 401(k) plans was also discussed while noting that most IAM airline members have a defined benefit pension plan to augment their 401(k) savings.

"A failure and subsequent bailout of the PBGC would affect all Americans but would fall most heavily on Middle Class workers and retirees who honored their obligations and played by the rules their entire lives," said Roach. "We need to take steps now to ensure that never happens."