



NATCA President Paul Rinaldi and Executive Vice President Trish Gilbert welcomed members to NATCA in Washington (NiW) 2019 on May 20. "This could be considered our fourth NATCA in Washington of 2019, due to the three rolling lobby weeks held earlier this year during the government shutdown," said Rinaldi. They also congratulated the 112 first-time attendees for what they said was taking the important steps to make our Union better, and applauded returning NATCAvists for their vested interest in the future of the National Airspace System (NAS).

Rinaldi and Gilbert discussed how aviation has been held hostage since 2007, with FAA reauthorization extensions, sequestrations, threats of shutdowns, and actual shutdowns.

"These stop-and-go funding crises wreak havoc on the personal lives of air traffic controllers and other aviation safety professionals, degrade the safety of the National Airspace System, delay critical modernization and infrastructure projects, and exacerbate the current controller staffing crisis," said Rinaldi.

From 2007-2012, Congress temporarily extended FAA authorization 23 times, denying the NAS stable, predictable funding. In 2011, Congress failed to extend FAA reauthorization and the government experienced a partial shutdown. In 2013, there was a 16-day government shutdown, and the FAA experienced sequestration spending cuts, which caused hiring freezes, and furloughs. In 2014, there were threats of a shutdown and in 2015, Congress was forced to temporarily extend FAA authorization. In 2018, there were five threats made to shut down the government, and three actual shutdowns, with the longest in history beginning on Dec. 22, 2018, and extending through Jan. 25, 2019. That was followed by a threat of another shutdown in early February that was avoided with just hours to spare.

Another crisis looms at the end of the fiscal year, Sept. 30, with the threat of funding expiring. "Too many times we have been put in the middle of disagreements that have nothing to do with aviation," said Gilbert.

They spoke to the extremely unfortunate timing of the shutdown. It happened during the December holidays, when most members of Congress had already left Washington, D.C. and were back at home. It was also just over a month after an election when the current party (at the time) in the House of Representatives lost. These series of unfortunate events all added to the length of the shutdown. "There is never a good time for a shutdown, however this one couldn't have come at a worse time," said Gilbert. "It wasn't until after the swearing-in of the 116th Congress, in the first week of January, that those who needed to come to an agreement to open the government started to feel the pressure and began to have meaningful discussions."

As expected, our Union took action, before, during, and after the shutdown. NATCA members worked together, taking our message to the media, the flying public, the federal courts, and Capitol Hill. We left no stone unturned, making sure our members had a voice, and their voices were heard.