AMERICAN AIRLINES FLIGHT ATTENDANT UNION PRESIDENT QUITS AMID TURMOIL OVER MERGER CONTRACT

News / Airlines

The president of the flight-attendants union for American Airlines is resigning effective Dec. 2 under the threat of a recall election over the merger with US Airways.

Laura Glading, president of the Association of Professional Flight Attendants with 25,000 members, had said already that she wouldn't seek a third term after nearly eight years in the post. But she said a threatened recall election to hasten her exit by several months would be divisive and cost US$200,000.

"If any of us can stop it, we should," Glading wrote in a letter announcing her resignation. "However, today, our voice is not unified and I believe some appear to have lost sight of our duty to represent and advocate for our fellow flight attendants."

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The union's board is meeting Oct. 5 and 5 in Euless, Texas. Flight attendants, some of whom requested a Justice Department investigation of the latest contract under Glading's leadership, plan to picket the meeting.

The union turmoil comes as the department investigates whether major airlines -- American, Delta, United and Southwest, which together carry 80% of the nation's air travelers -- colluded to limit available seating, in order to boost profits.

"We are investigating possible unlawful coordination by some airlines," the department said in a July statement, without setting a deadline for resolving the case.

The airlines have denied wrongdoing and said they are cooperating with the investigation.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., a former state attorney general, requested the investigation because of concerns that "capacity discipline" in matching flights with travelers "is just a fancy term" for restricting flights after a series of mergers among the largest airlines.

American merged with US Airways in December 2013, and the combined contract with flight attendants was contentious. Workers voted down one proposal in November 2014 before receiving the current five-year contract after arbitration.

Glading heralded the contract for raising pay while protecting jobs for 5,000 attendants with the least experience.

"We continue to fight for legislation and regulations that will once and for all eliminate flight attendant fatigue and guarantee cabin air quality," Glading said in her letter.

But some in the union argued that Glading settled too easily with the merged company.

Rock Salomon, a Boston-based flight attendant in the union who is critical of Glading, said workers lost faith in her leadership because of numerous points in the contract, including that it didn't include a profit-sharing plan negotiated during American's bankruptcy reorganization before the merger.

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