



Member Update

National Training Representative Jamaal Haltom Calls for an Increased Commitment to Training as the Foundation of NATCA's Future at ATX

National Training Representative Jamaal Haltom delivered an impassioned speech this morning during the opening general session of the third day at NATCA's biennial Activism and Training Expo (ATX) at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. Haltom focused on the vital role of training in shaping the future of the air traffic control profession and emphasized the collective responsibility of NATCA members in advancing training standards.



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"We can't talk about everything related to training in one session, but we can

focus on what matters most: changing this profession and getting it where we want it to go. That happens through training,” Haltom said. He noted NATCA’s success in securing the Federal Aviation Administration’s (FAA) commitment to maximizing hiring over the next five years. However, he stressed that hiring alone isn’t enough. “It doesn’t really matter how much we hire if we don’t train and aren’t successful with those we do train.”

Haltom recognized the broader contributions of on-the-job training instructors (OJTIs), acknowledging their critical role in molding the next generation of air traffic controllers.

“We’ve increased our OJTI pay by 25% and are successfully incorporating simulation for the first time,” Haltom said. He urged OJTIs to stand and be recognized, calling them the elite professionals who make the complex task of managing the National Airspace System (NAS) appear seamless. “You are the ones who make traversing this nation feel effortless. From the skies over Guam to Puerto Rico, you turn a vast system into a connected world.”

“Fewer than 11,000 certified professional controllers (CPCs) handle the enormous responsibility of moving people and commerce across the nation,” Haltom said. “Despite our size, we deliver results that make the world feel smaller and travel feel easy.”

Haltom candidly addressed the challenges facing training programs, including current certification rates which fall below the five-year average. “If we hire 2,000 people, we know we’re not getting 2,000 out of the air traffic academy in Oklahoma City,” he said. “But those who do graduate are trained by the best in the business.”

He called on NATCA members to embrace trainees as valued colleagues and provide them with unwavering support, rejecting the traditional “hazing” culture. “Let’s turn that around. What if we start telling them on day one, ‘I need you so badly, I’m going to pour everything I can into making you successful’? We can get our success rate up. Let’s look at them and treat them as if they’re our family members. Treat them as the valued additions to our profession. Treat them as valued members of society who we believe in. That’s how we get stronger. That’s how we get better.”

Haltom emphasized that a cultural shift in training is essential for long-term success. “I believe in training, I have faith in all of you, and I know you all believe in training. This is our opportunity to reflect ourselves in all that we do so we’re always doing our best. You are leaders in this room. Take what you’ve learned back to your facilities and ask, ‘How can we make training better?’”

Haltom urged attendees to take the lessons learned at ATX back to their facilities and advocate for effective use of resources like simulators and skill training programs to reduce training times. “Be part of the change you want to see. Stand up for your fellow members, stand beside one another, and let’s train our way out of this disaster,” he concluded. “Together, we can make NATCA stronger and better prepared for the future.”

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