

2016 AMA Presidential Election Endorsement Letter

The business landscape is littered with the corpses of companies who mistakenly viewed fundamental change as a threat to their existence instead of the valuable opportunity it represented. The 2016 AMA election represents a pivotal moment in our community; one which will determine whether the AMA and our hobby are relegated to quaint obscurity (along with companies like Blockbuster, Sears, Blackberry and most print newspapers) or whether in 20 years the AMA will still be a relevant and bold player in the world of model aviation, however that world may evolve.

I have spent the past 20 years innovating traditional industry approaches to business (autos, classifieds, events and RC). The only time I look backward at how things “used to be” is to gain insight on how to make them better. In business, like nature, you must either evolve or die. It’s just a matter of time. Our time is now. The relevance of the AMA and, in turn, the Congressional protections afforded our hobby depend on whether the next administration will embrace the future or turn and hide from it, hoping that it can survive from within a comfortable bubble of tradition — the “way it’s always been.” At issue is whether the AMA should or should not embrace the stunning growth of non-traditional pilotless aircraft, namely, multi-rotor, FPV and autonomous aircraft. I believe the path we take will determine whether the entire hobby (including the AMA) will be relevant in 15 years time.

Among the three candidates, I believe that Eric Williams is best suited to keep the AMA relevant as the environment around us rapidly changes. To understand how I get to Eric, let’s consider at the candidates.

Lawrence Tougas

Lawrence Tougas is a smart guy. His credentials in aeronautical engineering and experience with full scale aircraft in the private and public sectors are impressive. Lawrence works with a major domestic airline and has seen, first hand, how airlines that can adapt to rapidly changing business environments stay alive and those that do not either get gobbled up or liquidated. Ironically, Lawrence has come out strongly against the AMA embracing the burgeoning world of multi-rotor and FPV flying. Indeed, his blog states:

*Traditional modeling is the foundation of our organization. I'm referring to Free Flight, Control Line, and Radio Control modeling. The "new hot" thing is multi-rotor modeling (MRM) and first person view (FPV). While these are interesting facets of the entire aeromodeling picture, they are not its core. [sic] **We must return the AMA's focus back to traditional modelers.***

Lawrence’s view of the AMA should concern every AMA member who expects the AMA to remain relevant in local, state and national affairs over the next decade. The reason the AMA was able to get and maintain our FAA-exempt status is that Congress views the AMA as the

voice of our community and the strongest influencer of behavior among model aviation enthusiasts. What happens when that community expands and the AMA is hunkered down protecting “traditional” modeling? *The AMA become less relevant.* When the AMA becomes less relevant, their sway in protecting what is left of our hobby diminishes considerably. Unlike Lawrence, I view the non-traditional market as opportunity, not a burden. There are certainly challenges, but like all nascent markets, this one will mature and when it does, the AMA should be right in the center of it with more members, more revenue, better programs and more influence. This type of growth will not only benefit, but actually preserve, the rich traditions Lawrence seeks to protect by turning his back on the inevitable future of our hobby. If the AMA sits on the sidelines, some organization will step up and grab this small but rapidly growing market. Blockbuster Video made a similar mistake when it passed on an opportunity to purchase Netflix for \$20 million dollars. They wanted to keep their “make money from late fees” business model because it had gotten them to the top of the mountain. Netflix, born from a “no late fees” perspective would become a \$40 billion dollar company. Blockbuster went bankrupt. I view the sector which Lawrence marginalizes as one that will quickly dominate our traditional hobby in terms of participants and revenue. Either the AMA will be a key player in this future or it will fade into obscurity like glow engines.

Rich Hanson

Without a doubt, Rich Hanson has the chops to be AMA president. His experience lobbying on behalf of the AMA (and us by extension) is beyond reproach. It is Rich’s vast knowledge and experience in this area that makes me want him to focus on that (vs. all the trappings of the presidency) during the next few years as critical decisions are made on the state and national levels.

This afternoon, I participated as a legislative task force member in a meeting of the Colorado Agricultural Aviation Association. Their issues revolve around the safety of low flying aircraft (e.g. crop dusters, EMS helicopters) in airspace occupied at times by ordinary citizens flying off-the-shelf quadcopters. The goal of the group is to come up with sensible legislation to protect full scale pilots before a disaster happens and legislators from all states rush in with inconsistent and ill-conceived regulations. There are similar meetings going on all across the country. In my view, Rich should be laser focused on this aspect of the AMA to the exclusion of all other matters. To me, having Rich as president is like using your star running back on offense and defense. Instead, we could have Rich running on the legislative front while Eric Williams covers the role of president.

Eric Williams

In my view, Eric Williams is best suited for AMA president. At the “young” age of 58, Eric has plenty of energy and enthusiasm to carry the load of the office. More importantly, he has the right outlook and significant experience in the regulatory, education and marketing aspects of our hobby. Eric readily embraces technology and the new wave of non-traditional hobbyists, who will make up an ever-increasing portion of our membership base in the years to come. Eric believes in working with this segment to improve safety, education and participation in the hobby. Eric also correctly views this segment as a pool of potential new crossover hobbyists, not a group of people to hide from. In Eric’s world, if it flies without a pilot in the seat, it belongs under the AMA umbrella. I believe this view will keep the AMA highly relevant for decades to come.

I have been an AMA member since 1974. I fully intend to stay immersed in this wonderful hobby until I cannot get my rickety butt to the flying field. I have also spent the better part of 15 years creating software to improve all aspects of our hobby. Anybody who read a digital issue of RC Pilot Magazine or used the RCU marketplace or RC FlightDeck understands my passion for taking the status quo and elevating it to levels unimagined by those complacent with tradition. I strongly believe that Eric can lead the AMA into the future by viewing the changes in our community as opportunities, not problems.

I encourage all of you who read this to cast your vote for Eric Williams.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Kranitz", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael Kranitz, CEO
RCFlightDeck.com