

Grievance accuses Boeing of violating contracts by cutting education funds



SEATTLE – An extensive and detailed formal grievance was filed today (Friday, Jan. 22) against The Boeing Company for violating union contracts when it cut and significantly changed a negotiated program that funded employees’ continuing education.

Boeing and the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace (SPEEA), IFPTE Local 2001, started negotiating proposed changes to the Learning Together Program (LTP) in December. Without completing negotiations, Boeing unilaterally implemented the cuts and changes on Jan. 13.

“These cuts are clear violations of our collective bargaining agreement and the National Labor Relations Act,” said **Ray Goforth**, SPEEA executive director. “More than 3,300 of our members trusted Boeing to honor its promise to fund their continued education. Boeing pulled funding in a manner that breaches its own ethical standards, the company’s ‘Code of Conduct,’ and forces employees to break commitments they made to schools, family and coworkers.”

In addition to the grievance, union lawyers are preparing unfair labor practice charges against Boeing. The charges should be filed with the National Labor Relations Board in the coming week. Among the union complaints is that even before implementation, Boeing required SPEEA-represented employees to agree to the cuts and changes before gaining access to their individual education accounts.

While not specifically called out by name in union contracts, Boeing repeatedly referred to the education funding program during negotiations as a valuable benefit for SPEEA-represented employees. Boeing used the education program to attract new employees and as an example of the company’s commitment to “life-long” learning. During the 2008 contract talks, Boeing cited LTP as a key component of employment stabilization in the Puget Sound Professional, Technical and Wichita engineering contracts.

“Boeing’s unilateral and abrupt implementation of these cuts essentially abandoned employees to their own devices to figure out how to meet financial commitments they made based on Boeing’s now broken promises to fund their education,” Goforth said.

During negotiations, Boeing agreed to remove a provision that would have required SPEEA-represented employees to retroactively repay the company money used for classes no longer covered under the revised program. The company also agreed to pass along tuition discounts it negotiated with schools. However, provisions remain that would punish employees for negotiating and accepting discounts on their own.

A local of the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE), SPEEA represents more than 24,400 aerospace professionals at Boeing, Spirit AeroSystems in Kansas, Triumph Composite Systems, Inc., in Spokane, Wash., and at BAE Systems, Inc., in Irving, Texas.

Text of the complete grievance is available on the SPEEA website at www.speea.org.

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