

SPEEA pushes Boeing to grant pension survivor benefits to same-sex married members



SEATTLE – When new contracts are negotiated and ratified by engineers and technical workers at The Boeing Company, same-sex married members in the Professional and Technical bargaining units will have the security of knowing pension benefits can be passed on to their spouse, thanks to the diligent work of members, elected officials, equality organizations and negotiators of the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace (SPEEA), IFPTE Local 2001.

While still locked in contract negotiations for 23,000 engineers and technical workers, The Boeing Company and SPEEA have tentatively agreed on contract language that grants same-sex couples the same pension survivor benefits that have been available to heterosexual married couples. The agreement comes after SPEEA Benefits Director Matt Kempf recognized, and made an issue of, a loophole in contract language that allowed Boeing to deny pension survivor benefits to same-sex couples.

“I started looking at this several years ago when a dying, gay member, came in to ask about passing on his earned pension benefit to his partner of 30 years,” Kempf said. “We couldn’t help them and it just seemed so very wrong.”

<p style="text-align: center;">Supporters</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Congressman Adam Smith Congressman Norm Dicks Congressman Jim McDermott Congresswoman Susan DelBene Alaska Airlines – Association of Flight Attendants, CWA United Food & Commercial Workers New York Working Families Party Equal Rights Washington LGBTQ Allyship</p>

When Washington state voters approved marriage equality in November, SPEEA negotiators again brought up the issue of same-sex survivor pension benefits during contract talks with Boeing. Hearing the company was still denying same-sex couples this earned benefit, SPEEA Diversity Committee member Ken Aphibal started a petition on the progressive website Change.org. The petition flooded Boeing CEO Jim McNerney with more than 79,000 emails and drew support from other unions, community groups and members of the Washington state Congressional leaders.

“I’ve always advocated for these benefits and this win feels really good,” said Aphibal, who is engaged to marry his partner Bennett. “I have years before retiring, but for anyone close, this will change their life. They will be able to look at their loved one and know they will be taken care of. Boeing is now a leader for granting these benefits to gay and lesbian couples. All the hard work on this issue by my union shows how important organized labor is today and another reason why I work for Boeing.”

With Boeing agreeing to grant same-sex pension survivor benefits to SPEEA- represented engineers and technical workers, Aphibal said he is hopeful the company will now extend the same benefit to its other 150,000 employees.

A local of the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE), SPEEA represents 26,300 aerospace professionals at Boeing, Spirit AeroSystems in Wichita, Kansas, and Triumph Composite Systems, Inc. in Spokane, Wash.

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Contact: Bill Dugovich, SPEEA communications director, (206) 674-7368 or (206) 683-9857
Ray Goforth, SPEEA executive director, (206) 433-0991
Matt Kempf, SPEEA Benefits Director, (206) 433-0991
Ken Aphibal, (425) 478-0788 or kenneth.m.aphibal@gmail.com