

SPEEA seeks information about Boeing's use of foreign workers



SEATTLE – Concerned about continuing efforts to increase the number of foreign workers allowed at U.S. companies, the union representing engineers and technical workers at The Boeing Company is seeking detailed information about the number of employees working technical jobs at Boeing through federal visa programs.

Today, (April 1) the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace (SPEEA), IFPTE Local 2001, submitted a formal request for the data to Boeing. In addition to the number of foreign workers, the request seeks information on the process used to renew visas and the treatment of foreign workers by the company.

Today, April 1, is the day the federal government takes applications for the 65,000 H-1B visas issued by lottery.

Supporters for the visa programs claim foreign workers are needed to keep U.S. industry competitive. However, union officials said companies use the visas to bring in workers who will work for lower wages. When the workers return home, they take with them high-tech knowledge, skills and experience that undermines U.S. competitiveness.

According to union records, about 50 workers on H-1B or TN (trade NAFTA) visas perform work that could be done by U.S. citizens. Additionally, about 300 contractors from Russia work under the B-1 (business) visa program.

“We are concerned that the drive to increase the number of foreign workers is based less on need and more on the desire for lower-cost labor,” said Ray Goforth, SPEEA executive director. “Moreover, when these visa holders return to their home countries they take key skills and abilities to Boeing’s overseas competitors.”

In October, SPEEA begins main table negotiations with Boeing for 21,000 employees in Washington, Kansas, Oregon, Utah and California. Negotiations begin in May for 3,000 represented employees at Spirit AeroSystems, Inc. in Wichita, Kansas.

A local of the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE), SPEEA represents more than 24,000 aerospace professionals at Boeing, Spirit, Triumph Composite Systems, Inc., in Spokane, Wash., and at BAE Systems, Inc., in Irving, Texas.

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