

NLRB vote delays opening of SPEEA-Spirit contract talks



WICHITA, KAN. – Disrupted by a group of employees working to eliminate the written employment contract for 2,400 professional workers at Spirit AeroSystems, Inc., negotiations between the company and two union bargaining units are delayed until mid-June.

Talks were scheduled to open Tuesday (May 20) between Spirit management and the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace (SPEEA), IFPTE Local 2001. Midway into a six-year contract, negotiations were scheduled to make necessary adjustments to wages and benefits for the final three years of contracts for the Wichita Technical and Professional Unit (WTPU) and the Wichita Engineering Unit (WEU).

This week, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) ruled that a petition filed by a group of employees shows sufficient interest to call for a recertification vote for employees in the WTPU. The vote, set for Tuesday, June 24, determines if employees keep the union and their contract or become “employees at will” with no guarantees or protections. All employees covered by the WTPU contract are eligible to vote in the NLRB election. The petition and vote does not include the 675 professional engineers in the WEU.

“It’s very unfortunate that a group of decertifiers chose to derail the negotiations for everyone,” said Ray Goforth, SPEEA executive director. “We would rather be working with the company to solve employee problems. Instead, the company and our union are forced to deal with this needless distraction.”

During preliminary meetings with Spirit management this week, it was apparent neither the union nor Spirit could devote proper resources and attention to negotiations with the NLRB election taking place during talks. The vote comes just two weeks before the contract opener expires on July 11. Union members will vote on the negotiated agreement but because the contract itself does not expire, a strike is not possible.

Formal and informal polling by SPEEA shows support for the union increasing among employees. During the past two months, more employees chose to become full dues-paying SPEEA members than at any time since 2000, when professional and technical workers organized the WTPU.

“We are confident employees will recertify our union,” said Bob Brewer, SPEEA Midwest director. “When we get to negotiations, we’re going to get the bonus employees deserve and bring home the benefit and wage increases they need to ensure a stable future for themselves, their family and the company.”

SPEEA represents 3,800 aerospace professionals in Wichita at Spirit and The Boeing Company. Overall, the professional union represents 24,200 engineers, technical and professional employees in Kansas, Washington, Oregon, Utah and California. The union also represents aerospace workers at BAE Systems, Inc., in Irving, Texas, and Triumph Composite Systems, Inc., in Spokane, Wash.

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