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FAA Files Complaint After Union Talks Break Down

By Stephen Barr

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Contract talks between the Federal Aviation Administration and its second-largest union fell apart yesterday amid a set of unusual maneuvers.

Shortly after noon, the leaders of the Professional Airways Systems Specialists announced they had agreed to the agency's contract terms and would send the agreement to union members -- but with full confidence that the rank and file would turn it down.

Within hours, the FAA said it planned to file an unfair labor practice complaint against the union -- a step usually taken by unions, not the government.

The breakdown in talks came after the FAA and the union held their second negotiating session out of six agreed to in ground rules for the talks. The rules called for the negotiations to end by July 21.

The union, known as PASS, represents more than 11,000 FAA and Defense Department employees who install, maintain and certify air traffic control equipment, inspect and oversee commercial and general aviation industries, and help develop flight procedures. The contract talks were focused on about 7,000 air traffic technical employees, the union said.

The FAA has taken a tough stance in contract talks over the last year, seeking changes in pay, leave and work rules. It is engaged in especially contentious bargaining with the National Air Traffic Controllers Union, and both sides recently agreed to mediation to extend those talks.

If the FAA and its unions fail to reach agreements on contract extensions, the agency may declare an impasse, which sends such disputes to the Republican-controlled Congress for a 60-day review. If Congress takes no action -- more likely than not -- then the FAA's last, best offer can be imposed on the unions.

The FAA also is one of only a few government agencies that can negotiate with unions over compensation, and it hopes to use contract talks to reduce labor costs and fold union employees into pay-for-performance systems.

Mike Derby, general counsel for PASS, said the FAA's initial proposal would have denied a pay increase to the union members for seven years. "How could that be characterized as fair and efficient?" he said.

In a statement yesterday, *Tom Brantley*, president of PASS, said the union had accepted the FAA contract proposal after concluding that the agency was not negotiating in good faith. "I am confident that PASS members will vote down the contract offer, which will send PASS and the FAA back to the bargaining table. Hopefully, the FAA will learn a lesson," Brantley said.

A union spokeswoman said a ratification vote would probably take about 90 days. A rejection would then lead to a new round of negotiations, she said.

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Greg Martin , the FAA spokesman, said the agency will file a complaint with the Federal Labor Relations Authority that charges PASS with failing to bargain in good faith.

He said he could not discuss specifics of the contract talks but noted that at least 40 contract provisions had not been discussed at the bargaining table. "What we have here is a clear delay tactic," Martin said.

He added, "Unfortunately, PASS has resorted to stunts. . . . By engaging in this stunt, they are creating a crisis where none exists."

Derby said the FAA's decision to file a complaint "sounds like a stunt to me."

Retirements

Laura B. Antle , human resources officer at the Justice Department's Office of the Inspector General, will retire April 1 after 32 years of federal service.

Romana Danysh , a historian at the U.S. Army Center of Military History, will retire April 2 after more than 41 years of federal service, all of them at the Center of Military History.

Nancy Leonard , a public health adviser for the Food and Drug Administration, retires today after 41 years of federal service. She serves as the FDA breast implant specialist and public affairs liaison to field and district offices and is a steward and a vice president in the National Treasury Employees Union.

Talk Shows

Randy E. Dobbs , chief executive of USIS, which conducts background investigations on federal employees, will be the guest on "Fedtalk" at 11 a.m. today on federalnewsradio.com and WFED radio (1050 AM).

Matthew Miszewski , chief information officer for the state of Wisconsin, will be the guest on "The IBM Business of Government Hour" at 9 a.m. Saturday on WJFK radio (106.7 FM).

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