

SC Boeing Workers Vote To Reject Union

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CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) -- Workers at a South Carolina Boeing Co. plant have voted against continued representation by a union as the company considers the site for a second assembly line for its new 787 wide-body jetliner.

Workers at the North Charleston plant, which makes fuselage sections for the 787, voted 199-68 Thursday against continued representation by the International Association of Machinists.

Anyone who wants to challenge the vote has seven days to file an objection before the results are certified, Eslinger said.

The workers, by a slim margin, voted for union representation when the plant was owned by Vought. Boeing last month bought the plant from Vought for \$580 million plus about \$420 million in debt forgiveness,

Aviation analyst Scott Hamilton had told the Post and Courier of Charleston that he expected to vote to decertify the union because the original vote to unionize was close. But he said that won't guarantee a second assembly line.

"A lot of other factors are involved, not the least of which is a risk factor of establishing a brand-new line down there with new hires that have to be trained in the complicated process of assembling a complete and operational airplane," he said.

The union staged an eight-week strike last year at the Puget Sound assembly line that stalled, for a time, production on the aircraft.

Hamilton said that even if the union is decertified, union leadership or another union could attempt again to organize.

"You're not going to have a plant like that with a company like Boeing and not have some union try to organize," Hamilton said.

Boeing spokeswoman Candy Eslinger said the Thursday vote will have no bearing on where the company expands, a decision expected by year's end.

"That's all been public speculation," she said. "There is no connection between the vote and the location on a second line."

The company has said it is looking at several sites, including North Charleston.

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Boeing announced last month it is seeking permits to expand its South Carolina plant, but said it was simply a procedural step because of the lead time required to secure permits.

Boeing hopes to have the second assembly line operational by 2012.

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