Pratt Lays Off Workers In Retaliation For Outsourcing Block

Stephen Singer, AP Business Writer

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — Jet engine maker Pratt & Whitney delivered a blow to its unionized work force Tuesday, announcing it will lay off 163 employees and appeal a judge's decision blocking it from moving 1,000 jobs out of Connecticut.

Just hours after announcing the planned layoffs at its Cheshire and East Hartford facilities, company president David Hess said Pratt & Whitney strongly disagreed with the federal court's ruling earlier this month and planned to file an appeal.

Hess told employees in a letter that the subsidiary of United Technologies Corp. is reacting to a downturn in the airline industry due to the recession. Closing two engine repair businesses and moving the jobs to Georgia, Japan and Singapore would reduce costs by more than $53 million a year, he said.

"The impact on families and communities is significant and these decisions are never taken lightly," Hess said. "But unfortunately, I do not have the luxury of considering only the fate of the employees who are directly affected by this decision. I need to think about all 36,000 employees of Pratt & Whitney and the company's long-term health and competitiveness."

Hess said nothing in the court's ruling changes the economic realities facing the company and its airline customers.

"These problems cannot be ignored and they will not solve themselves," he said.

Operating profit at Pratt & Whitney fell nearly 14 percent last year, to $1.84 billion from $2.12 billion in 2008.

U.S. District Judge Janet Hall ruled Feb. 5 that Pratt & Whitney failed to make every effort to preserve the jobs in Connecticut as required by its contract with the machinists union.

James Parent, the union's chief negotiator, said the union will demand that Pratt & Whitney prove that the layoffs, which represent about 20 percent of the jobs at the two facilities, are related to falling volume and are not an attempt to shift jobs in violation of the court ruling.

Wayne McCarthy, president of the Machinists local at Pratt & Whitney's Cheshire plant, one of the two operations targeted by the company, dismissed the company's claims about a downturn in business. Employees at Cheshire have been working 10-hour days Monday through Friday and have worked some weekends, he said. In addition, jet engines were kept in the parking lot "because we have so much

work inside."

Even before Pratt & Whitney announced its appeal, the machinists union said its legal victory was temporary because it expects to go another round in the fight over job preservation when its collective bargaining agreement expires in December.

Pratt & Whitney has scaled back operations in Connecticut since the 1960s, when more than 20,000 workers were employed. The company now employs 11,000 in Connecticut, fewer than one-third of its global work force.

Greg Brostowicz, a spokesman for the company, said it will submit its appeal Wednesday to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit in New York.

The appeal will "address errors in the court's analysis of the collective bargaining agreement and the court's conclusions," he said.

Gregg Adler, the union's lawyer, said he believes the company is "just disagreeing" with Hall's factual conclusions and will ultimately fail.

"It's got to be a pretty severe blow to have these two things happen on the same day," he said. "To the workers it's a slap in the face."

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