

Labor Board Drops Boeing Complaint

Sam Hananel, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The National Labor Relations Board on Friday officially dropped its high-profile case challenging Boeing's decision to open a nonunion aircraft manufacturing plant in South Carolina.

The board acted after the Machinists union approved a 4-year contract extension with Boeing earlier this week and agreed to withdraw its charge that the company violated federal labor laws.

Lafe Solomon, the board's acting general counsel, said he had always preferred a settlement. The agency settles about 90 percent of its cases.

Under the deal, Boeing promised to build the new version of its 737 airplane in Washington state. The Machinists also agreed to drop allegations that Boeing opened the South Carolina plant in retaliation for past union strikes.

Both Solomon and the agency had come under intense criticism from Republican lawmakers and South Carolina officials for bringing the case. Republicans and business groups claimed the agency was setting a dangerous precedent by interfering with a legitimate business decision about where to locate workers.

But Solomon said he was simply following the law and might do it again if faced with similar facts.

"This case was never about the union or the NLRB telling Boeing where it could put its plants," Solomon said in a conference call with reporters. "This was a question for us of retaliation, and that remains the law. If we were ever faced with a similar pattern, we might well issue a complaint."

Solomon said the Boeing complaint was always about the loss of future jobs in the Seattle area. The new deal between Boeing and the union resolves that issue ,because there is now job security in Seattle and job security at the North Charleston plant, he said. Both sides say the agreement ushers in a new era of labor peace after years of acrimony.

Boeing spokesman Tim Neale said the company continues to believe the complaint was without merit and should have been dropped.

"Boeing is grateful for the overwhelming support we received from across the country to vigorously contest this complaint and support the legitimate rights of businesses to make business decisions," Neale said.

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