

US Air Line Pilots Association strikes Comair

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Members of the Air Line Pilots Association struck Comair, the second largest US regional airline, at 12:01 a.m. Monday after the collapse of contract negotiations. The walkout by 1,350 pilots forced the airline to shut down its entire operation.

Comair pilots are asking for an increase in wages comparable to the level of pilots at Delta Airlines, Comair's parent company. Pilots at Comair generally earn substantially less than pilots at Delta. Starting pay can be as low as \$15,000 per year, and about 420 pilots earn less than \$30,000 per year. Pilots are also calling for more rest between flights and pay for time they actually work; not just the time they spend flying. They also want the company to create a retirement plan.

The strike is the first at Comair since it was founded 24 years ago. The airline also operates under the name Delta Connection. It serves 95 cities in North America and the Bahamas.

President George W. Bush issued a statement shortly after the strike began, saying he would not intervene. Earlier this month the White House blocked a strike by Northwest Airline mechanics. At the time Bush declared he would act to prevent any airline strikes this year. Under terms of the Railway Labor Act the president has the right to block a strike by airline employees only if federal mediators find that a strike would hurt the economy. So far the Federal Mediation Board has not made such a determination in relation to the walkout at Comair.

Delta officials have said the airline will not try to service struck routes with its own planes. Delta pilots broke off negotiations with the airline last week. Leaders of the Air Line Pilots Association are set to meet later this week to consider an offer of binding arbitration by the Federal Mediation Board. If the pilots reject arbitration they could be free to strike Delta in late April or early May.

United Airlines, the largest US air carrier, and

American Airlines also face possible strike action later this spring. The 23,000 members of the Professional Flight Attendants Union at American have been without a contract for more than two years. The 15,000 United mechanics have been without a contract since last July. Both unions are asking federal mediators to declare an impasse, the first step toward a possible strike.

See Also:

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