

Whitmire, council still disagree over rehiring of workers

HOUSTON (AP) — City council members and Mayor Kathy Whitmire remained split Tuesday on the fate of 83 sanitation workers who were fired during a protest over layoffs and increased workloads.

Whitmire dismissed the workers last week after they went to the city's four solid waste service centers and refused supervisors' directives to go to work.

A four-hour meeting Monday between the mayor and four council members ended with no resolution. The council members want the workers reinstated, while Whitmire is opposed to letting them return to work.

"We really don't have anything to announce," Whitmire said after the evening meeting. "That's why we didn't invite the press."

The mayor said the talks were productive, but she refused to say how close they are to a conclusion.

Councilman Rodney Ellis said Whitmire "has shown a willingness

to listen," and hoped that further talks would provide a breakthrough.

If Whitmire accepts amnesty, the workers will still pay a price for the wildcat strike, such as a two- or four-week suspension without pay, officials said. The average laborer earns about \$350 per week.

Meanwhile, city crews supplemented by temporary workers were sent out on all 137 city routes as the Solid Waste Management Department continued its efforts to restore normal collection schedules.

The wildcat strike began Aug. 18 when 400 of the city's garbage collection drivers and laborers began a protest of extended working days and other working conditions.

The councilmen have pushed Whitmire to rehire the workers, but she has said the workers were fired for an illegal strike and are being replaced with workers laid off earlier.

Sixty-nine of the fired workers have appealed to the city Civil Service Commission.

Late mail

Couple receives lost letters husband wrote during WWII

HOUSTON (AP) — During World War II, Charles Reass wrote of undying love for his young bride, who was finally able to read what he had to say this week when the Postal Service delivered a batch of 42-year-old letters.

Houston Postmaster Samuel Green Jr. on Monday presented the eight letters with apologies for the delayed delivery to Charles Reass and his wife, Eunice.

"I knew the post office always comes through," joked Reass, 64.

Reass said the letters actually were delayed due to a problem in the military — and not with postal workers.

As an Army private, Reass wrote the letters to his wife of 19 months while on board a troopship bound from Virginia to North Africa.

"When I say, 'I love you,' it means that every morning when I open my eyes, I love you more than when I laid down, and each night when I lay me down I love you more when I wake up," one of the letters said.

Opening one of the letters, Reass studied one for a moment, and then said, "I suspect these are a little on the mushy side."

Reass' letters to his wife, his parents, an aunt and a service buddy were among 235 pieces of V-Mail found recently in an attic in Raleigh, N.C.

A young man from Raleigh, now dead, was to have mailed the letters, but for reasons unknown, did not do so.

Instead, he left a duffel bag full of mail in his aunt's attic.

V-Mail sheets were a combination letter and envelope supplied to servicemen on uniform stationery.

They were mailed free of charge and accorded preferential sorting and transportation.

A pest control operator recently discovered the mail while working in the aunt's attic and turned them over to the Postal Service.

Until two weeks ago, the couple did not know the letters were missing.

Reass said that since he wrote his wife nearly every day during the war, he never checked on whether each of his letters had been received.

Number of active rigs decreases

HOUSTON (AP) — The number of working oil and gas rigs in the country dropped to 727 after the count had increased five weeks in a row, Hughes Tool Co. officials said.

The count dropped 11 from last week's total of 738, company officials said Monday. Last year at this time the count was 1,940. In July, the rig count hit an all-time low of 663, officials said.

Before 1971, the lowest number was 805 rigs working in April 1943, according to officials of the oil tool maker that has kept industry statistics since 1940.

More than 1,000 rigs have been idle since December when oil prices began to decline, falling as low as \$9 a barrel. Since Dec. 23, the rig count has dropped steadily from 1,995, officials said.

In contrast, 4,500 rigs were active in December 1981.

Government nixes Eastern-Texas Air merger proposal

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government on Tuesday grounded the proposed \$676 million purchase of Eastern Airlines by Texas Air Corp., but said it would consider a new merger plan that resolves competitive problems in the lucrative Northeast air-shuttle market.

A spokesman for Texas Air Corp. said the company remains committed to the merger and is "absolutely confident" it will still get prompt government approval. Eastern officials also said they are optimistic the government's objections can be resolved.

Industry and government sources, who spoke on the condition they not be identified, said the two companies are likely to rework their merger plans as quickly as possible and resubmit them to the Transportation Department.

One solution, one of the sources said, would be to help Pan American World Airways obtain needed airport access — especially at New York's LaGuardia Airport — so it can better compete with Eastern Airlines in providing air shuttle service between Washington, New York and Boston.

The Transportation Department gave tentative approval to the Texas Air-Eastern merger on July 9, but at the time conditioned the decision on assurances that a final deal would preserve competition in service between the three cities.

Eastern Airlines and New York

Air, already owned by Texas Air Corp., now compete head-on with hourly flights linking Washington, New York and Boston, making it the most heavily traveled commercial air corridor anywhere.

The merger of Eastern with Texas Air, which also owns Continental Airlines, would create the country's largest airline holding company, slightly larger than United Airlines.

The department said Tuesday it had no problems with the merger except for the impact on competition in the Northeast and that a new proposal aimed at solving those problems would be reviewed expeditiously, "with the focus on the proposed competitive remedy issue."

But the department said the merger before the government would bring both Eastern and New York Air under common control and eliminate effective competition in the Washington-New York-Boston shuttle corridor.

Texas Air thought it had resolved the Northeast competition question with a deal last May with Pan Am in which Pan Am bought some of New York Air's landing and takeoff slots at New York and Washington for \$65 million.

Pan Am plans to begin shuttle service in competition with Eastern in October.

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