

million American, pilots look to mediation

WASHINGTON (AP) — With 90,000 jobs and travel plans for more than 200,000 people a day at stake, American Airlines and its pilots turned to a federal mediator Monday in an effort to avert a holiday-weekend strike.

If no agreement is reached by midnight Friday, the pilots have threatened a strike and the airline has said it would shut down. That would hobble one-fifth of the nation's air-travel capacity, leaving ticketed passengers without a ride.

A federal mediator will shuttle proposals between representatives of the nation's largest domestic airline and the Allied Pilots Association at a downtown hotel.

The Fort Worth, Texas-based airline, a division of AMR Corp., has promised to try to accommodate passengers by helping them find seats on other airlines if a strike is called. But that may be a difficult promise to keep with most seats on other carriers filled going into the Presidents Day weekend.

"We would ask that our passengers be somewhat flexible," said American spokesperson John Hotard.

The National Mediation Board asked for the same from the two sides in the talks.

"I think we're going into this with an open mind. It's a very focused situation," said mediation board chair Kenneth Hipp. "We hope it will be a short week."

American and the union, which represents only American pilots, are butting heads over compensation and job security, although other contract issues could be discussed.

The pilots, who have not had a basic wage increase since their contract became amendable in 1993, are asking for raises more than double what the company offered in a tentative contract, voted down by the union last month.

The company had agreed to increase salaries by 3 percent this year and 2 percent in 1999. It also had added stock options that were understood to represent retroactive pay since the contract has already been in talks for more than two years.

The union is seeking raises of about 11 percent over four years, plus increased stock options. American pilots earn an average \$120,000 a year.

Although pay plays a large role, the second and possibly more divisive issue is who should fly the company's small jets.

AMR had hoped to buy 67 jets to be flown by its commuter division, American Eagle. American pilots said no dice, wanting Eagle to remain strictly the "propeller division."

Airline president Donald J. Carty said the issue is American's competitiveness; the union says it believes American pilots can fly the small jets at comparable costs.

As the rhetoric gears up, so has fear of a strike. "At times like this there's a lot of tension," said Carty.

Pilots, who have walking informational picket lines, report taunts and obscene gestures from other employee groups. There also have been several reports of threats.

Pilots are being instructed to be careful in their comments and not to park in the employee lots.

"People are anxious, but that doesn't mean they should take it on themselves," said airline spokesperson Chris Chiamas. "The pilots are not the enemy."

Victims' shoes represent drunken driving deaths

AUSTIN (AP) — With a display of 1,782 pairs of shoes reminding them of the lives lost to alcohol-related traffic crashes in just one year, state senators voted Monday to crack down on Texans under 21 who drink.

"This bill ... will save lives in the years to come," said Sen. Royce West, D-Dallas.

His "zero-tolerance" bill is among measures backed by Mothers Against Drunk Driving, which brought the shoe display to the Capitol.

West's bill would suspend the driver's licenses of those under 21 caught in possession of alcohol or driving with even a trace of alcohol in their system.

It passed the Senate without objection, although concern was raised by Sen. Chris Harris, R-Arlington, because the bill would not require young drivers to be given a

blood-alcohol or breath test to prove they had been drinking.

West said the provision could be reviewed as the bill is considered in the House. He said if such a test was not given, that fact would be admissible in court.

As senators debated the measure, workers and visitors in the Capitol extension walked by rows of shoes lining a hallway to symbolize the lives already lost to drunken driving.

A toddler's tiny sneakers, house slippers shaped like fuzzy bear paws, a 6-year-old boy's scuffed-toe black shoes, women's high-heeled sandals and men's cowboy boots — there was a pair for each of the 1,782 people that MADD says died in alcohol-related crashes in Texas in 1995.

"All we ask is that ... while the members of the House and Senate debate the pros and cons of these

issues, is that they remember the mothers, fathers, sons and daughters who would have filled these shoes if their lives had not been cut short by a drunk driver," said MADD's Bill Lewis.

Lawmakers also should remember those whose lives were changed by drunken drivers, backers of tougher legislation said.

Among them are 11-year-old Mitchie Mitchell, who must use a wheelchair because he was a victim in a 1989 drunken driving accident, and his mother, Joyce Hunt of Austin.

"At the tender age of three, the choice of drunk driver to take away his ability to walk, his ability to lead a life as that drunk driver leads his today — no one should have that right," Hunt said.

That driver, she said, was her ex-husband and Mitchie's father. Hunt said her ex-husband was

charged with a driving-while-intoxicated offense and served two years of a five-year sentence. Mitchie, meanwhile, spent 333 days in the hospital and underwent 18 operations.

"Do you have to be there to feel the pain? I hope not," Hunt said. "We can't stop drinking and driving, but we can do things to deter it."

Under current law, which bars minors from buying or consuming alcohol, those under 21 can lose their driver's license if they are found to have a blood-alcohol level of 0.07. The legal intoxication level for adult drivers is 0.10.

Under West's bill, any detectable amount of alcohol would be illegal for drivers under 21. Penalties would include license suspension, community service and, for repeat offenders, the possibility of incarceration.

BOWEN

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"I need to do it more often," Bowen said. "We've got some great teachers."

Bowen said his statistics class was large and most students were unaware he was there.

"They looked at me kind of funny," Bowen said. "They were thinking 'Who is this old guy?'"

Megan Lask, event coordinator and a sophomore business major, said the fundraiser gives Bowen the opportunity to get in touch with the students and get back to his roots by attending classes.

"It's not every day you see the president of the University running around with the rest of the students," Lask said.

The only class Bowen did not attend was his beginning aerobic running class at 10:20 a.m.

"Smart students strategically cut class," Bowen joked.

In Rudder Tower, Williams fulfilled the role of University president by sitting in on the daily presidential executive staff meeting, attending an NCAA Steering Committee meeting and holding a discussion with A&M Men's Head Basketball Coach, Tony Barone.

"We talked about advertising for basketball and what we need to do to get more people in the stadium," Williams said.

Williams said she was worried about trading places because she did not know what Bowen's position entailed.

"I picture it being a job where you're always talking to somebody," Williams said, "either going to meetings all day or always being on the phone. You must be very good at personal relations."

Williams said one of the highlights of the switch was using Bowen's parking spot on the first floor of the University Center parking garage. Williams' roommate took her to school and parked her car in his spot.

Williams said she first purchased one ticket for the fund-raiser. But she received a cash refund from her apartment complex's laundromat so she bought an extra four dollars worth of tickets.

"It (the refund) was pretty random," Williams said. "I was just 'well, go ahead and give it to them (United Way).'"

Bowen supports the United Way event on a voluntary basis. He plans to participate anytime it helps.

"It's a very worthy cause," he said. "I'd be happy to do it again."

During United Way Awareness Week (March 24-28), a check including the proceeds from "Be Bowen for a Buck," will be presented by the students of A&M to the Brazos County United Way.

Jenna Martin, A&M United Way Pack president and a senior international studies and political science major, said Williams is a great student and had a lot to talk about with Bowen.

"It was so successful," Martin said. "We really appreciate Dr. Bowen giving up his time."

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