

Retired Delta Air Pilots Seek Court Rejection Of Wage Pact

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ATLANTA (AP)--A group that represents some retired Delta Air Lines Inc. pilots asked a bankruptcy court judge Tuesday to reject the carrier's latest wage-concession agreement with its pilots union.

The Delta Pilots' Pension Preservation Organization said in its objection that if the agreement reached last month is approved it would set the stage for drastically reducing certain pension benefits of the airline's 5,800 retired pilots.

A hearing on the objection is scheduled for May 31, the same day Delta's active pilots are scheduled to complete their voting on the agreement, which the nation's third-largest carrier says would save it an average of \$280 million a year.

The court has the final say.

A Delta spokeswoman did not immediately return a call seeking comment on the objection. Delta has said in the past that the agreement has the support of creditors and the pilots union.

The retired pilots say the agreement is improper because they believe it goes beyond what is necessary to help Delta successfully reorganize. They also allege in their objection that Delta failed to negotiate the agreement "so as to treat fairly and equitably all creditors and affected parties."

The new agreement, which includes an initial 14% pay cut and assurances the union won't fight the company's likely plan to terminate the pilots' defined benefit pension plan, would replace an interim deal accepted by the pilots that became effective Dec. 15.

Leaders of the pilots union ratified the new agreement April 21, a week after the airline and union negotiators hammered out the deal.

If the deal is not approved by the airline's 5,930 active rank-and-file pilots or the court, it could revive the threat of a pilots strike. That's because an arbitration panel that Delta had asked to reject its pilot contract so it could unilaterally impose the cuts it is seeking would again consider the request. The pilots have said repeatedly they would strike if their contract is voided.

Delta's pilots previously agreed to \$1 billion in annual concessions, including a 32.5% wage cut, in a five-year deal in 2004.

Delta filed for bankruptcy in September.