

## **Jury out on how, when Lockheed F-35 plant strike might affect Pratt**

By Howard French  
Journal Inquirer  
Friday, April 27, 2012

When Machinists union workers walked out on contract talks at Lockheed Martin's Texas plant that makes the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, the move caught the attention of Pratt & Whitney workers in Connecticut, more than 1,700 miles away.

East Hartford-based Pratt is the exclusive jet engine supplier for the F-35, also known as the "Lightning II." It's not clear how long the Texas strike can continue before it affects Pratt's engine-production lines.

Raymond Jaworowski, senior aerospace analyst for Forecast International in Newtown, says it's difficult to tell how soon Pratt's engine production could be affected.

"It all depends on how long the strike goes on," Jaworowski says. If it is relatively short, two to three weeks, he says, it likely will have minimal impact on suppliers such as Pratt.

At the same time, the Joint Strike Fighter program is at a "very critical juncture," Jaworowski says, explaining that Congress and the Defense Department are looking for ways to hold down the cost. "There is a lot of pressure on Lockheed to bring costs down," he says.

The program's "perilous state," Jaworowski adds, could "force the union's hand" and end the strike quickly.

However, Mike Stone, assistant directing business representative for the Machinists union's District 26 in Connecticut, said members of Texas Local 776 at Lockheed appear to be strongly united in opposition to the company's contract offer. And he warns that such a determined membership could mean a protracted strike.

About 94 percent of workers voted to reject the contract, and 93 percent voted to approve a strike, he said, calling the numbers "unprecedented."

The Texas workers particularly object to Lockheed's demand to end traditional pensions and switch all new hires to a 401k plan instead, Stone said.

Connecticut union members have not organized any solidarity rallies or informational picket lines in support of the strike that began Monday, Stone said.

Pratt spokeswoman Stephanie Duvall said the Lockheed strike hasn't affected her company's production.

"We are aware of the strike at Lockheed Martin, and there are no impacts to Pratt & Whitney," Duvall said in an email Thursday. The few Pratt employees who do work at Lockheed Martin facilities in connection with the Pratt engines also are working "as usual without disruption," she added.

Duvall did not comment on how a prolonged strike might affect Pratt's Connecticut plants in Middletown and East Hartford.

The Texas strike is the second potential threat this year to F-35-related engine production at Pratt. In late February, Japan's Defense Ministry warned that it may consider canceling a huge contract to buy nearly \$5 billion worth of the fighter jets unless both the price and delivery schedule remain stable.

The Japanese deal, announced last December, is worth more than \$1 billion to Pratt.

Japan has said it ultimately wants to buy 42 planes. But it warned the contract could be in jeopardy if delays and cost increases continue.

Forecast International's Jaworowski has said that Japan's cancellation warning might be mostly an effort to maintain the contract price. Although it has to be taken seriously, he said, the cancellation threat "should be seen mostly as a negotiating tactic."

In addition to Japan, the F-35 program involves eight development partners beside the U.S.: Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Turkey, Canada, Australia, Denmark, and Norway.