2,000 CONTRACT AIRPORT WORKERS WENT ON STRIKE AT SEVEN U.S. HUBS

News / Airports / Routes

Entering one of the busiest holiday travel weeks of the year, about 2,000 baggage handlers and other airport workers at seven of America's biggest hubs went on strike Wednesday night over pay and union rights.

The work action began at John F. Kennedy and LaGuardia in New York, Boston Logan, Chicago O'Hare, Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood in Florida, Newark Liberty in New Jersey and Philadelphia, said the Service Employees International Union, which wants to unionize the contract workers.

The strike is expected to last at least through Thursday, said the union, which is seeking a minimum wage of US$15 an hour for the contract workers and elimination of what it says is retribution by private contractors against employees seeking to unionize.

"Intimidation, harassment and antiworker tactics don't belong in airports," the union said.

Several airlines, including JetBlue and United, said they had plans in place to ensure that passengers weren't significantly affected. Others, including American and Delta told Reuters they didn't expect the strike to have a significant impact because the action involves cleaners, baggage handlers and others who work for private contractors - not pilots or flight attendants.

The Massachusetts Port Authority, which oversees the Boston airport, said Wednesday that it had

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received allegations in recent months that private firms working at the airport had violated state wage laws, discriminated against workers based on national origin and retaliated against workers seeking to unionize.

The authority said that it had turned over two wage allegations to the state attorney general and that it supports higher wages for contract workers.

20 NOVEMBER 2015

SOURCE: NBCNEWS
ARTICLE LINK:
https://ids.50skyshades.com/news/airports-routes/2000-contract-airport-workers-went-on-strike-at-seven-us-hubs

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