Grassroots support

From cockpits to the tarmac, workers say no to takeover

BY SCOTT WILLIAMS
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D/FW AIRPORT — Employees of American Airlines rallied behind management yesterday and said they hope Donald Trump's bid to take over the airline never gets off the ground.

From pilots to baggage handlers, those interviewed at Dallas/Fort Worth Airport said they are counting on parent company AMR Corp. — target of the $7.11 billion bid — to do battle with Trump.

"He'll tear up what we have strived to build," pilot Herb Ganner said. "We've strived hard as employees to make this company a success. I can't see that it would do anything but bring the company down."

Word of the attempted takeover, announced early yesterday morning, spread quickly through American's two terminals at D/FW, the flagship hub of the Fort Worth airline.

Employees congregated in small groups and could be overheard discussing the development.

Among the workers interviewed, many said they are apprehensive about the takeover because of Trump's reputation as an opportunistic investor. They worry that the New York entrepreneur would not make a long-term commitment to the airline.

"He'll turn right around and sell it at a profit," said Charles Dunlop, a fleet service employee.

Flight engineer Kevin Little said he is concerned that the acquisition would prove too costly and that Trump would be unable to resist selling the airline quickly.

"Wall Street probably sees this as an opportunity to make some cash," Little said. "The employees themselves don't like the idea."

Most workers had high praise for AMR, which has steered the airline through rough times to become the nation's largest and most profitable carrier.

Workers said they enjoy a healthy and relaxed work environment. And they are concerned that a change in management would jeopardize job security, wages and working conditions.

"I'm comfortable with the way things are," veteran maintenance worker Mary Trigg said. "I'd like it to stay that way."

"They've treated us good," added Sollie Pearson, a skycap with 29 years of seniority. "I'm sure if Trump took over, we wouldn't be treated so good."

Of the company's approximately 22,000 employees in the Metroplex, about two-thirds are unionized.

The Allied Pilots Association, which represents American's pilots, said on its telephone hotline recording yesterday that the company has briefed its officers on the Trump offer and that "APA also will be initially working with the firm of Shearson Lehman on this matter."

Shearson Lehman Hutton Inc. is a major Wall Street investment banker. It is not one of AMR's principal investment bankers, which are Goldman Sachs and Salomon Brothers.

In past airline takeovers, the hiring of an investment banker by a major union has indicated that the union is at least considering taking an ownership position in a possible restructuring.

Pilots association officials could not be reached yesterday to elaborate.

A spokesman for the Association of Professional Flights Attendants, which represents 4,500 workers at American, said the union has not decided whether to play a role in the takeover battle.

But spokesman Alan Fahringer said it is not surprising that employees are supporting management despite past disputes with the company.

Referring to AMR Chairman Robert Crandall, he said: "Yes, he's an S.O.B. But he's our S.O.B."

Several employees also mentioned Crandall by name, with most saying they hope that if Trump's bid succeeds, the chairman will remain involved in the airline's operation.

"He's such a company man," baggage handler Tim Fuller said. "He treats it like it's a family."

Fuller also noted that takeover rumors had been circulating for weeks and said he takes comfort in the knowledge that Crandall probably was prepared.

"I would not want to go up against that man," he added. "He'll fight to the death."

Staff writer Jim Fuquay contributed to this report.



Flight engineer Kevin Little makes clear his feelings about a possible takeover of AMR Corp.