

Union Suing Defense Department

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COLUMBUS, Ohio -- A public-employees union said the Defense Department is illegally turning over operations at the Newark Air Force Base in central Ohio to private companies.

A lawsuit filed Monday by the American Federation of Government Employees in U.S. District Court in Columbus also challenges similar plans for other bases in the country.

The union represents employees at Hill Air Force Base in Ogden, which is a co-plaintiff in the lawsuit, said Hill/DDO spokesman Mike Pavich.

"Our union will not stand idly by while critical defense measures are ignored," said John Sturdivant, union president. "Defense workers know more than anyone else how to keep this nation ready for any military emergency."

Pavich called the action "the first shot fired against privatization in place. It was filed in federal court in Columbus, Pavich said, "because this is where the law has been broken."

Last year, the department awarded \$283 million in one-year contracts to Rockwell International and Wyle Laboratories of Hampton Va., to repair and service guidance systems for aircraft and missiles and to operate a metrology lab at Newark.

The operations had been performed by civilian employees of the Defense Department. The private companies expect to retain most of the 1,400 workers currently employed at the Newark base in Heath, about 30 miles east of Columbus.

"The Air Force does not comment on lawsuits," said Mike Wilson, spokesman for the Newark base.

The plan is expected to be completed by Oct. 1. It is seen by the military as a test case for Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas, and McClellan Air Force Base in Sacramento, Calif.

The lawsuit said federal law requires that other Defense Department bases and depots be allowed to bid on any contract. But only private companies were allowed to bid on the Newark operations, the suit said.

“That's work that could have been done here {at Hill} or at Warner Robins” Air Logistics Center, a part of Robins Air Force Base, Ga., said Pavich, a retired Air Force general who heads a civic group determined to keep Hill Air Force Base and Defense Depot Ogden open.

The Defense Department believes turning operations at Newark and other bases over to private agents will save taxpayers money. But the union said other studies have shown that it will cost the government more money.

The AFGE suit said a recent Government Accounting Office analysis indicated privatization in place at Newark Air Force Base is costing taxpayers an extra \$600 million.