

Bankrupt coal company asks for contract cuts

Southern Illinois mine retirees may be effected

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CARBONDALE, Ill. — A bankrupt Kentucky coal company is asking union miners across Southern Illinois and other states to accept big contract cuts that could hit retirees hard, union officials said Thursday.

Horizon Natural Resources, which is reorganizing under Chapter 11 bankruptcy rules, is asking the United Mine Workers of America to cut health benefits in the union's national contract and accept other rollbacks, union spokesman Doug Gibson said Thursday.

"They are big cuts, and we're doing our best to get them off the table," Gibson said. He declined to specify the level of cuts the company is seeking while negotiations are ongoing.

The proposed cuts, which a federal bankruptcy judge must ultimately approve, would affect 1,000 active and 3,400 retired miners from Horizon's

mines in Illinois, Colorado, Kentucky, Indiana and West Virginia, the union said.

Horizon, based in Ashland, Ky., filed for bankruptcy protection in November of last year. It operates 26 mines, company spokeswoman Kellie Roth said.

Horizon, formerly AEI Resources, owns the Zeigler No. 11 mine near Coulterville, Ill., and formerly owned the Old Ben mine near Benton, Ill., which employed miners in far Southern Illinois for much of the last century.

Joe Angleton, the UMWA's president of District 12, which includes most of Horizon's operations, said retirees' pensions wouldn't be affected by any cutbacks because they are federally insured. But health care is a different matter, he said.

"We'll spend whatever it takes and use whatever legal resources (we must) to make sure we get everyone what they have coming," he said.



Janice Sidewell and Rick Cantwell have been reunited with their kids, Damien, 2, and Angel, 9. (Michael Tercha | The Observer)

"Drug court saved our family"

Drug courts provide alternative program for meth users

Liza Stein
Observer Reporter

PITTSFIELD, Ill. — Janice Sidewell stood and proudly told a Pike County circuit judge that her children were finally home. Two rows of methamphetamine users applauded.

"Congratulations," Judge Michael Roseberry told her. "Good job."

Sidewell, 39, then grabbed a bag of Reese's Pieces from a candy bowl on the edge of the witness stand, a reward for her son and daughter.

Sidewell and the children's father had been caught twice for selling and using meth. They had served prison time and lost custody of the children.

And if the couple had remained in the criminal justice system, they would likely still be in prison today, in a cycle of drug abuse and incarceration that is a common path.

Instead, with the help of prosecutors and a judge, they ended up in Pike County's drug court, an administrative office that has become, for all intents and purposes, a meth court, devoted to alternative responses to methamphetamine crimes.

Like most drug courts, meth court

is in some ways a kinder, gentler approach. For non-violent offenders, the court offers a chance to avoid prison time and provides a much fuller safety net, directing addicts to drug counseling, mental health treatment, even parenting classes.

To address the long-lasting effects of methamphetamine and the tenacity of meth addiction, Pike County, about 270 miles southwest of Chicago, has gone a step further, with longer periods of supervision and exceptional levels of intervention.

That not only helps users beat the habit, experts say, but also improves chances to reunify families such as Sidewell's.

Sidewell entered meth court in December 2004 and has been clean since, said Barb Allensworth, Pike County's chief probation officer. This month Sidewell regained legal custody of her children.

"Come hell or high water, she wanted her children back," Allensworth said.

Though a judge typically runs drug courts, it is not an adversarial process but rather a venue for teams of probation officers, counselors and attorneys to find a common plan.

How they carry out that plan, and

how much individual attention is possible, can depend on where the drug court is located.

In a Chicago drug court, where 150 people fight mostly cocaine and heroin addictions, there are no chocolates. While Pike County requires 18 sober months to graduate, a Chicago participant can graduate after six clean months, according to Cook County Drug Court Coordinator Susan Stanger.

"We have such an urban setting, to hold people that long when we have a high caseload is not practical," Stanger said.

But for all its special treatment, some offenders in rural Pike County say their drug court can be harder than prison.

The intense regimen—daily drug testing, frequent counseling, proof of employment, financial plans, even a neat and up-to-date appointment book—requires a level of commitment some offenders can't handle.

Those who drop out go back into the criminal court system. But for those who make it through meth court, "graduation" means a party with cake, punch, a diploma and a watch.

Authorities say it also means a much greater likelihood of staying clean and

out of trouble.

Methamphetamine is a highly addictive nerve stimulant sold in pill, powder or solid form that can be smoked, injected, snorted or swallowed. Meth can be made by anyone, just about anywhere, and one user said she could once turn \$100 in supplies into \$1,000 in profit.

The high from smoking meth can last a day, compared with cocaine's 30-minute high, according to the National Institute of Drug Abuse. Afterward, meth stays in the body many times longer than cocaine.

Pike County officials say their drug court was the first in Illinois to specialize in methamphetamine, beginning in 2003, focusing on the long recovery period and high rate of relapse.

More meth courts might be on the way.

"We are trying to monitor Cook County cases to see if we have to do that," Chicago Police Lt. Robert Stasch said. "If it's necessary that we have a dedicated court, I don't doubt that is something that would be forthcoming."

It's up to the judge and prosecutors to determine whether to defer criminal proceedings and send a meth offender to drug court. [See **Court**, A2]



Russians soldiers patrol the border with Crimea on the eve of the Referendum on whether to region should rescind autonomy and join in with the Russian Federation. (Toby Miller | Reuters).

Conflict in Crimea

US, European Union intervene as Russia, Ukraine continue struggle over borders

By DAVID M. HERSZENHORN and ALAN COWELL | AP

SIMFEROPOL, Ukraine — As the pro-Russian authorities in Crimea pressed ahead on Thursday with measures to break away from Ukraine and become part of Russia, President Obama said that their plans for a referendum would "violate the Ukrainian Constitution and violate international law."

The developments came as the United States and the European Union moved to provide new support for the national government in Kiev and sought ways to press President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia to de-escalate the crisis in Ukraine. The United States announced a framework for imposing new sanctions, while the European Union suspended talks with Russia on a variety of issues including visa liberalization.

President Obama said in Washington: "Any discussion about the future of Ukraine must include the legitimate government of Ukraine. We are well beyond the days when borders can be redrawn over the heads of democratically elected leaders."

The pro-Moscow authorities in Crimea, and the Kremlin itself, seemed to be undeterred by pressure and criticism from abroad. They moved to tighten their grip on the Crimean Peninsula, where Ukrainian military installations are under a blockade by Russian forces.

The regional parliament in Crimea said on Thursday that a referendum would be held on March 16, two weeks earlier than initially planned, offering citizens of the region a choice of remaining part of Ukraine with greater autonomy from Kiev, or joining the Russian Federation. The referendum, rejected by Ukraine, had originally been scheduled for March 30.

The city council of Sevastopol, which has a separate legal status from the rest of Crimea, took matching steps on Thursday, voting to hold a similar referendum on March 16. Pro-Russian demonstrators outside government buildings in the city cheered the news and regarded secession from Ukraine as a foregone conclusion.

"We're already Russian," Natasha Malachuk said as she picketed a local security headquarters. Another protestor, Vyacheslav Tokarev, declared, "We're

citizens of Russia, we're returning home."

A court in Kiev has already ruled that the Crimean Parliament's actions are broadly illegal. An arrest warrant has been issued for the new prime minister of Crimea, Sergei Aksyonov, who heads a political party called Russian Unity and who was installed a week ago after armed men seized the Parliament building and raised the Russian flag.

Despite such measures, Crimean lawmakers also said on Thursday that they had approved a resolution seeking membership in the Russian Federation.

Officials in Simferopol, the Crimean capital, said that the resolution was a required legal precursor to calling the referendum. The impact of the move and the consequences of its timing, however, appeared unclear. European and Ukrainian authorities rejected the latest moves, saying they violated the Ukrainian Constitution and represented the views only of pro-Russian lawmakers in Crimea.

"My position is that this referendum is unconstitutional," the Ukrainian economy minister, Pavlo Sheremeta, told reporters in Kiev. A senior European official said Ukraine's constitution required any change of territorial sovereignty to be put to a vote of all Ukrainians, not just those in one region.

In Moscow, Dmitri S. Peskov, a spokesman for Mr. Putin, was quoted by Russian news agencies as saying that the Kremlin had been informed of the developments in Crimea but had no further comment. Prime Minister Dmitri A. Medvedev said that Russia would simplify the procedures for people who have lived in Russia or the former Soviet Union to secure Russian citizenship.

Ukraine's interim prime minister, Arseniy P. Yatsenyuk, who was attending the European Union meeting in Brussels, reiterated his call for the Russian government to order Russian military forces back to their barracks in Crimea and to withhold support of "the so-called government of Crimea." He told reporters the planned referendum in Crimea was "an illegitimate decision."

"This referendum has no legal grounds at all," he said. Mr. Putin, he said, is trying to build a new Berlin Wall.

[See **Crimea**, A3]



Dead fish float on the surface of Maninjau lake, Agam regency, West Sumatra province, Indonesia. The mass death of the fish is apparently caused by a sudden change in weather condition according to fishery officials. (John Mernakis | Associated Press)

Bolivian protests lead to president's resignation

By Patrice M. Jones
Observer reporter

LA PAZ, Bolivia — Bolivian President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, isolated and embattled after weeks of crippling nationwide protests, resigned Friday, leaving a nation scarred and emboldened after a popular uprising ended his 14-month presidency.

Vice President Carlos Mesa was sworn in as president after Congress formally accepted Sanchez de Lozada's resignation Friday night.

Sanchez de Lozada had tried for weeks to hold on to the presidency, but a crumbling governing coalition and street clashes that left as many as 80 civilians dead made his presidency unsustainable.

Roadblocks and mounting protests that paralyzed the nation for a month had delayed a special session of Congress called Friday either to accept a letter of resignation or call for the president's ouster.

Local media reported earlier that Sanchez de Lozada had left the presidential residence in a helicopter for the city of Santa Cruz. He left behind a scathing resignation letter that said his departure set a "dire precedent" for democracies in Latin America.

Local reports also said Sanchez de Lozada was leaving the country.

Man dies after outburst on plane

Passenger's unruliness leads to emergency landing; investigation in progress

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Alexander Siess was on a recent flight from Mexico City to Paris when, authorities say, he became so unruly the pilot made an emergency landing at Kennedy International Airport.

Minutes after the 767 jet touched down, the 25-year-old Austrian was dead.

The circumstances of the little-noticed death last weekend — which may have involved alcohol and a violent struggle — remain murky.

An autopsy on Siess was inconclusive; toxicology and other tests were pending.

"We've been told it's an open investigation and we should wait for the outcome," said Gregor Csorsz, spokesman

for the Austrian consulate in Manhattan, which notified Siess' parents about his death.

Csorsz said Siess was a student from St. Anton, but knew nothing else about his background.

Calls to the parents' home in Austria on Friday went unanswered. Another Austrian official in New York, Sigurd Pacher, said that the victim's brother traveled to the city, but was too upset to talk.

"He's still trying to cope with what happened," said Pacher, who did not give the brother's name.

Contacted this week, authorities and airline officials offered only fragmented accounts of what happened Oct. 11 on AeroMexico Flight 5.

Sometime after departing Mexico City, the pilot sought permission to land

in New York "for the safety of the passengers and the plane," AeroMexico spokesman Mario Maraboto said.

Siess, who apparently was traveling alone and toting a bottle of whiskey, grew drunk and belligerent, Maraboto said. A male flight attendant confined him to his seat while the plane landed, the spokesman added.

Three U.S. law enforcement officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the investigation is continuing, described a more dire situation. They said they were told Siess reportedly "freaked out" and "charged the cockpit." As many as 12 other passengers joined in a struggle to subdue him, then tied him up with belts and stockings, the officials said.

One of the law enforcement officials said a physician on the flight may have

injected Siess with a sedative as well — part of an initial report that prompted the FBI and other federal agents to respond to Kennedy.

The Port Authority Police Department, which took over the ongoing investigation, declined comment on the reports.

By the time the plane reached the gate, Siess was in cardiac arrest, Port Authority police said. An ambulance took him to Jamaica Hospital, where he was pronounced dead about 9 p.m.

Authorities grounded the plane long enough to question the crew and passengers. Then, shortly after 1 a.m., the plane was allowed to take off again for Paris.

On Friday, Siess' body sat in a Queens morgue, unclaimed.

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