

## ADDING INJURY TO INSULT, PRIMEFLIGHT LAYS OFF EMPLOYEES



According to San Antonio Express News reports, PrimeFlight, a contractor, supplying wheelchairs and other services to airlines, is laying off more than 300 workers in Texas. The company is under scrutiny by the Labor Department which is investigating charges that the company has been asking workers to supplement their wages with the tips they receive, and to ensure that they receive enough tips, to enable their hourly wages to commensurate with federal minimum wage requirements. PrimeFlight made headlines news last year, when its employees in San Antonio and Houston complained that they were pressurized by the management to falsify tip income, so that would not have to pay more to meet minimum-wage requirements. Earlier in November 2011, PrimeFlight was suspended from a subsidy program, by which it received state funding upto \$2000 per employee, when it was revealed that it had asked workers to falsify tips. One worker had complained that she reports \$80 worth of false tips each month, imaginary earnings that she would be paying taxes on. The layoffs include 64 workers at the San Antonio International Airport and 276 workers at the Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston. This, the company says, comes in the wake of it losing its contracts with Delta Airlines and United Airlines. The contractor, based in Nashville, Tenn., told the Texas Workforce Commission that the San Antonio Airport employees would lose their jobs April 30, the day PrimeFlight's contract with Delta ends. PrimeFlight said in a its current contract with United Airlines, would end on May 15, 2012 and along with it, would bring to an end its operations at IAH, including all worker positions connected to the contract. These positions, PrimeFlight said, include, "155 wheelchair pushers, 62 cart drivers, 29 passenger escorts, 16 supervisors, 8 managers, 5 dispatchers and 1 office manager." PrimeFlight's employees could be so summarily dumped because they were not represented by a union and hence, left defenceless. PrimeFlight said that its employees were not represented by a union and none of them have bumping rights. Air services are known for frequent labor disputes and strange pay systems. Air Canada pilots, together reported sick forcing cancellation of around 75 flights. Ryanair, an European budget airline offered its workers a bonus to spot oversize bags and charge fliers to check them in. American Airlines, facing bankruptcy, had planned to ask a judge to nullify its contracts with labor-unions if they reached cost-cutting deals. A spokesman for the U.S. Department of Labor said it also has a wage-and-hour investigation into claims against PrimeFlight but could not discuss details. PrimeFlight could not reached for its comments on the matter.