



THE GOVERNMENT STANDARD

Vol. LXXVII, No. 4

September/October 2010

for current and retired government workers and their families since 1933
American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO

ELECTION 2010

Don't Turn Back the Clock



Why Political Action Matters

Make no mistake: the 2010 election is about your job and your retirement. We can never forget what anti-government leaders did to federal employees and all working families during the last time they ruled Congress. We must mobilize now to counter the conservatives who have galvanized and who hope, in one election, to take us back to the dark ages.

How do we hold on to our hard fought gains? We take to streets to make our voices heard and we endorse candidates that will stand up for government employees and effective government.

AFGE supports candidates who:

- Share AFGE's vision of effective government;
- Believe it's time to end the waste, fraud and abuse in contracting out and start insourcing jobs;



- Believe in collective bargaining rights for all federal employees;
- Believe that it's in the public interest to fully fund and staff federal agencies;
- Believe in the need to respect and reward the work of government employees; and
- Believe that fiscal responsibility demands an end to tax cuts for millionaires, billionaires and big corporations.

And when AFGE gives a candidate our endorsement, you can be sure that we've done our homework. We pour over voting records and meet with each candidate to communicate our issues and gauge whether he or she will stand by us—or stand against us. What happens in November will greatly affect AFGE members across the country and we are doing everything

in our power to protect the tremendous gains we've made—and to prevent policies that aim to turn back the clock.

What's At Stake

Anti-government, anti-union leaders are running on a platform that would cut pensions, salaries and jobs for AFGE members and other federal workers. AFGE has been able to stop these misguided efforts so far, thanks largely to supportive Democratic allies who remain in charge.

But all that will change if anti-government Republicans take over the House and Senate. If they win, it will be open season on federal employees. Remember what happened the last time they were in charge? They stripped away basic worker protections for federal employees across government and set up discriminatory

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READING the TEA LEAVES

The Tea Partiers and the Republican candidates they support are trying to retake control of Congress by exploiting voter anger over the economy. But what do they actually plan to do if they gain power? What “solutions” to our economic troubles do they propose? What impact will their actions have on the lives of working families and dedicated government employees?

Though they evade answers to these questions, preferring to attack, divert attention, and mislead the public, it’s not hard to read the tea leaves. And it’s not a pretty sight.

The Tea Party Republicans claim to be obsessed with reducing the deficit. Of course, this is brazen hypocrisy, considering that they want to extend the Bush tax cuts for people earning more than \$250,000, a move that would blow a \$680 billion hole in the deficit over the next 10 years. Indeed, their rhetoric is an effort to make the American people forget that it’s their policies that caused the massive deficit in the first place: the Bush tax cuts, the unpaid wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the economic deregulation that led to the Wall Street meltdown and the recession we’re in today.

Rather than tackle the deficit by fixing the mess they made, they want to slash programs that aren’t causing the problem — and that the American people need. It’s all part of their real agenda, which is to “shrink government to the point where they can drown it in the bathtub.”

So let’s look at what life would be like if the Tea Party Republicans get their way. We’ll see more people getting sick and dying from eating food contaminated with deadly toxins like Salmonella and E. coli, since there will be fewer food safety inspectors. We’ll see toxic waste dumped into our rivers and more carcinogens emitted into the air since the EPA’s ability to regulate and enforce the law will be eviscerated. We’ll see more staffing shortages and dangerous conditions in our prisons as they cut BOP. And we’ll see more people needlessly getting injured and killed on the job as they decimate OSHA.

And that’s only the start. For returning warriors needing ongoing care for combat-related ailments ranging from amputations to traumatic brain injuries to post-traumatic stress disorder, they’ll find a VA unable to meet their needs due to budget cuts and privatization. The Tea Party Republicans might as well send our heroes a card saying, “thanks for your service, but now you’re on your own. Good luck!”

For senior citizens on Social Security, there will be a revival of the Bush administration’s efforts to privatize this lifeline for retirees, reducing guaranteed benefits in exchange for the stock market casino. Three Tea Party darlings running for Senate—Rand Paul (Ky.), Sharron Angle (Nev.) and Joe Miller (Alaska)—all are calling for privatizing or even phasing out Social Security. They also want to do the same to Medicare.

For Americans in poor health, the Tea Party Republicans already have shown their cards, offering an amendment recently in the Senate to cut \$11 billion in funding for vital preventive health measures established by the health care reform law enacted last spring. This would torpedo money-savings investments in screenings for breast and colon cancer, smoking cessation and prevention programs, adult vaccine programs, and initiatives to reduce diabetes and heart disease. I guess they would rather see millions of Americans suffer and die.

This is only the first salvo in their efforts to undo the health care reform law by de-

funding it. In the process, they actually hope to provoke a government shutdown, despite the fact that the shutdown of 1995 was a political disaster for congressional Republicans. More than 160 Republican candidates for House and Senate have signed a pledge to defund health care reform, while disgraced former House Speaker Newt Gingrich has talked it up too. And recently, at a speech to the “Faith and Freedom Coalition” convention, Rep. Lynn Westmoreland (R-Ga.), a member of the House Republican leadership, said this:

...this is what we’re going to do. If government shuts down, we want you with us. We want you with us. We gotta have you because later on you all will call us and say look I didn’t get my check. Daddy can’t go to the VA. You know, the National Parks are closed. We need to be sure that you are with us because let me tell you this, all Americans need to understand. ... It’s going to take some pain for us to do the things that we need to do to right the ship.

In other words, they’re jumping at the bit to shut the government down again, leave Americans unable to go the VA or get their Social Security checks, and leave countless government employees out of work and trying to get by without a paycheck.

Is this really what the American people want? The right-wing extremist policies enacted from 2001 to 2007 are what put our economy in such awful shape that it will take more than two years of progressive leadership to dig us out of the hole we’re in. Impatience and anger are understandable, but it would be a tragedy of the worst sort these feelings lead to the most extreme politicians, charlatans and demagogues in history reclaiming power.

So here is what we’ve got to do.

First, we must understand that the election results are not pre-ordained. We hold within our hands the power to prevent the Tea Party Republicans from taking control of Congress. It will be hard work, but that’s never stopped us in the past.

As I told the AFGE Legislative Conference in February, “Our members and all our brothers and sisters throughout the labor movement must turn out and vote in their best interests, or else history will repeat itself. And then, most of the windows of opportunity before us will slam shut.” ▶

AFGE—The Government Standard

Vol. LXXVII, No. 4

September/October 2010

AFGE—The Government Standard (USPS 003-219, ISSN 1041-5335) is the official membership publication of the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO, 80 F Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20001 Phone: (202) 737-8700, www.afge.org. John Gage, National President, J. David Cox, National Secretary-Treasurer, Augusta Thomas, National Vice President for Women and Fair Practices. National Vice Presidents: District 2—Derrick F. Thomas, (732) 828-9449; NY, NJ, CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT. District 3—Keith Hill, (610) 660-0316; DE, PA. District 4—Joseph Flynn, (410) 480-1820; MD, NC, VA, WV. District 5—Charlotte Flowers, (770) 907-2055; AL, FL, GA, SC, TN, Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico. District 6—Arnold Scott, (317) 542-0428; IN, KY, OH. District 7—Dorothy James, (312) 421-6245; IL, MI, WI. District 8—Jane Nygaard, (952) 854-3216; IA, MN, NE, ND, SD. District 9—Michael Kelly, (405) 670-2656; AR, KS, MO, OK. District 10—Roy Flores, (210) 735-8900; LA, MS, TX, NM, Panama. District 11—Gerald D. Swanke, (360) 253-2616; AK, CO, ID, MT, OR, UT, WA, WY, Guam, Okinawa. District 12—Eugene Hudson, Jr., (760) 233-7600; AZ, CA, HI, NV. District 14—Dwight Bowman, (202) 639-6447; District of Columbia, Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties in Maryland; Arlington and Fairfax Counties and the City of Alexandria in Virginia.

Produced by the AFGE Communications Dept.: Director Enid Doggett; Communications Specialists Emily Ryan, Christina Erling, Jason Fornicola, Tim Kauffman; Assistant Chelsea Bland; Writers Tichakorn Hill, Michael Victorian; Interns Tyrone Bristol, Alisha Stewart. Photos Kenny Wright. Union layout by GO! Creative, LLC and union printing by Mount Vernon Printing Co. Postmaster: send change of addresses to AFGE—The Government Standard, ATTN: AFGE Data Processing Dept., 80 F St., NW, Washington, D.C. 20001.



ELECTION 2010: Don't Turn Back the Clock *continued from page 1*

pay and benefits systems for hundreds of thousands of employees at the Defense and Homeland Security departments—actions that have taken years for AFGE and our congressional supporters to undo.

Republicans have made it very clear they want to turn back the clock. Every right we have will be under attack. For the sake of every union principle we believe in, we can't let them win!

Many of our own members who were very excited about the changes that were proposed at the time of the 2006 and 2008 elections have mixed feelings about the results. That's understandable. Things are not perfect. But we can't let frustration over not getting everything we want block out the reality that we have made progress.

Just look at the dangerous schemes Republicans have cooked up so far:

- Republicans in the House and Senate attempted to force through legislation that would freeze salaries for the federal government's more than 2 million civil servants. Republicans John McCain of Arizona, Tom Coburn of Oklahoma and John Thune of South Dakota led the charge in the Senate, while Republicans Eric Cantor

of Virginia and Michele Bachmann of Minnesota forced a vote before the full House. AFGE's Democratic supporters defeated these harmful proposals, but they'll be outnumbered if Republicans are in charge.

- The McCain-Coburn-Thune hit team also tried to force an arbitrary cap on how many federal employees agencies could hire to do the vital work taxpayers expect. Fellow Senate Republican Orrin Hatch of Utah introduced similar legislation in August that would force agencies to roll back their employment levels by firing all employees hired after an arbitrary date. AFGE has pushed back against these misguided plans, but we won't be so lucky if Republicans are in charge.

- Judd Gregg of New Hampshire, the top Republican on the Senate Finance Committee, said federal cost-of-living adjustments should be frozen for the next three years, which would mean no increases to the Social Security payments our seniors rely on. Gregg could force through this punitive plan next year if Republicans are in charge.

- In July, Eric Cantor—the second-ranked Republican in the House—and other conservative leaders announced they wanted to cut federal pensions and eliminate early retirement benefits, costing federal employees thousands of their hard-earned retirement dollars. You can bet that'll be one of the first measures introduced if Republicans are in charge.

- House Republicans forced a vote on a proposal by Republican Phil Gingery of Georgia that would prohibit federal employees from performing union activities during the workday—hampering efforts to address employee grievances and represent the interests of union members. This is one of a handful of anti-government and anti-employee proposals Republicans promise to push through Congress if they are in charge.

"These attacks are an insult to VA doctors and nurses who take care of our veterans, Social Security employees who serve retirees and the disabled, Defense employees who support our troops,

scientists who find cures to diseases and the employees who protect public safety at our borders, in our airports, within federal prisons and at mines and food processing plants," said AFGE National President John Gage. "It is simply wrong to scapegoat and devalue the employees who perform such important work for the American public every day."

AFGE will continue to fight back aggressively against these attacks and work toward the change that we all believe is possible. But AFGE leaders can't do it alone. We need your support.

You can make the difference. Spread the word about what's at stake in this election to your fellow union members, to federal employees and to the community at large. When you go to the polls this Election Day, you must vote for those candidates who will defend our hard-working federal employees and our hard-won union rights. ●

MESSAGE FROM NP GAGE

continued

In Congress today, these windows are still open. Despite some setbacks, we are moving forward on our agenda to empower TSA employees, properly fund and staff our agencies, turn outsourcing into insourcing, and partner with management to improve the quality of our members' work lives and the services their agencies provide. What an utter shame it would be if we have to stop this forward progress and instead focus all our efforts on keeping us from moving backward.

That's why I urge all AFGE members to get involved in these pivotal mid-term elections. Help us build the largest volunteer political army in our history. Contribute to AFGE-PAC. Educate your fellow members on what the real Tea Party Republican agenda is and where the candidates stand on the issues affecting our lives. Join your sisters and brothers throughout the labor movement in unified efforts to turn out the union vote. And make sure that every AFGE member goes to the polls on November 2nd.

We can do it. We must do it. And we will do it! ●

AFGE SENATE ENDORSEMENTS

The following candidates for Senate elections deserve your support at the polls this November because they share AFGE's vision of an effective government, believe government employees should be respected and fairly rewarded, and have fought to end waste, fraud and abuse in contracting out and privatization schemes. AFGE proudly endorses:

CALIFORNIA

BARBARA BOXER
Democrat,
Junior U.S. Senator

ILLINOIS

ALEXI GIANNOULIAS
Democrat

INDIANA

BRAD ELLSWORTH
Democrat

NEVADA

HARRY REID
Democrat, Senate Majority Leader
and Senior U.S. Senator

OHIO

LEE FISHER
Democrat

PENNSYLVANIA

JOE SESTAK
Democrat

WASHINGTON

PATTY MURRAY
Democrat,
Senior U.S. Senator

GET INVOLVED! Educate yourself and others about the upcoming election by visiting the following websites: www.afgedecides2010.org
www.facebook.com/exerciseyourright

AFGE Propels Vincent Gray to Mayor of Nation's Capital

On September 14, 2010, Vincent Gray, chairman of the Washington, D.C. City Council, won the Democratic primary in the race for mayor, effectively securing election in the Democratic dominated District of Columbia. Gray was propelled to victory by the efforts of AFGE members and local area activists.

"We knew from the beginning that this election was an opportunity to change course, and take our city back,"

the public about the assaults on public employees' due process rights. AFGE took to the airwaves with a targeted radio ad campaign—"We Have a Problem with Our Boss"—and went viral with YouTube videos educating



Dwight Bowman, national vice president of AFGE's 14th District. "As chairman of the City Council, Gray operated with a sense of openness to discuss the issues at hand with area residents, city workers, and the community of organized labor. Mayor-elect Gray understands that city employees are not the problem and that blind privatization is never the answer. Public employees work in their chosen careers because they have a commitment to public service and because they love the District of Columbia."

AFGE launched a major campaign to educate the public about the misdeeds of the Fenty administration and mobilize working families to reclaim their city.

Through the "Take Back DC" campaign, AFGE worked with other like-minded organizations to mobilize events throughout the city aimed at educating

viewers about former mayor Fenty's anti-worker attitude.

Gray's win marks a sea change in the attitude of the city hall, after four years of one of the most anti-worker administrations the city has had in recent memory.

The Fenty administration had exercised a systematic campaign to dismantle the city's public employee unions and push working families out of the city. Throughout the campaign, Gray signaled that he viewed public employees and their union representatives as essential to making sure the city was respon-



sive to the needs of all its citizens.

Over the past few years, working families and public employees have watched as the District of Columbia has transformed into a place where most working families can barely afford to live. The city's public services were decimated through mass layoffs and outright privatization. Public employees attacked to score quick political points.

"We congratulate mayor-elect Gray and look forward to working with him to rebuild public services in the nation's capital," Bowman said. ●

Thousands of Reservists Still Entitled to Compensation

In the major 2003 AFGE legal win of *Butterbaugh v. Department of Justice*, the U.S. Federal Circuit Court of Appeals found that federal agencies improperly charged military leave to members of the U.S. National Guard and Reserves prior to December 2000. Consequently, thousands of federal civilian employees were charged military leave on days federal agencies did not require them to work, such as weekends or holidays. This significantly reduced the amount of military leave available to our

nation's citizen soldiers, forcing them to use annual leave or leave without pay in order to fulfill their military obligations.

In order to correct these agency-wide wrongdoings, federal personnel are able to file claims with the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) against the violating agency for wrongly calculated military leave as far back as September 20, 1980. Over time, these cases have been referred to as "Butterbaugh" claims.

Since first partnering in 2007, Tully Rinckey PLLC and AFGE have served the

legal needs of thousands of AFGE members interested in filing a *Butterbaugh* claim. The firm's unprecedented experience and dedication to AFGE members comes at no cost to any reservist or former reservist filing a claim.

If a *Butterbaugh* claim is successful, you will receive relief in one of two ways:

- If still employed by the federal agency, you will be compensated by receiving restored annual leave.
- If retired or separated from federal service, you will receive a lump sum payment for the lost leave, paid at the rate you were earning at the time of retirement or separation.

Filing a claim is easy. Go to www.FedAttorney.com, click on the "Military Leave Info" link on the right side of the home page, download the Intake Form, fill it out and return it as instructed. You may also contact Tully Rinckey PLLC directly at info@FedAttorney.com. Please make sure to notify Tully Rinckey that you are an AFGE member and that you learned of your rights from AFGE. After Tully Rinckey receives your information, an experienced attorney or staff member dedicated solely to handling *Butterbaugh* cases will contact you to discuss next steps. The full claims process can take months or even years; please reach out to a Tully Rinckey representative today to discuss your options.

While the firm has helped thousands of AFGE members, there are thousands more who may be unaware of their rights. If you or a fellow AFGE member you know may be entitled to compensation due to improperly charged military leave, e-mail Tully Rinckey PLLC today at info@FedAttorney.com or call at 202-787-1900. ●

Article contributed by Mathew B. Tully, founding partner of Tully Rinckey PLLC, the nation's largest federal employment law firm serving the legal needs of federal employees. Tully is a Major in the New York National Guard and a retired employee of the U.S. Department of Justice. He can be reached through Tully Rinckey PLLC's website at www.FedAttorney.com or at info@fedattorney.com.

AFGE Continues Fight for NAF Workers

Leaders from AFGE met Aug. 23 with Air Force officials to discuss the agency's ill-conceived plan to contract out food service operations currently performed by federal employees.

The Air Force intends to issue a contract by Oct. 1 to privatize food service operations at six bases: Elmendorf, Patrick, MacDill, Fairchild, Little Rock and Travis. It already is preparing to contract out food service operations at an additional eight bases, even though Congress has prohibited the Air Force from expanding the privatization beyond the initial pilot project until the Government Accountability Office completes an investigation.

The Air Force did not conduct a public-private competition, known as an A-76 study, to justify contracting out this work. It contends that the only employees who will be affected are Nonappropriated Fund (NAF) employees, who do not have the same worker protections afforded to other federal employees.

NAF employees could lose their jobs if contractors take over food service operations at the facilities they currently run, such as club houses, bowling alleys and golf courses. Under the Air Force contract, the winning contractor will take over dining hall operations that currently are funded with appropriated dollars and will have the option to submit proposals for taking over food operations in NAF-run facilities, which the Air Force contends are underused and costly to operate.

AFGE, which represents NAF employees at many of the Air Force bases being targeted through this privatization initiative, believes the Air Force should have given these valued federal employees an opportunity to submit their own plans for how food service operations could be improved before any decision was made to contract out this work. ●



It's Time to **Get Angry**

A FGE and the Social Security Administration have been neck deep in contract negotiations for the past six months and so far, the negotiating has been very one-sided. The AFGE bargaining team, headed by SSA Council 220 President Witold Skwierczynski, has offered a number of contract proposals to SSA's management team but so far, the agency has not responded to many of them. These callously ignored recommendations deal with employee benefits, leave transfer programs, annual leave, indoor air quality and national labor-management forums.

Prior to negotiations, AFGE distributed a survey to SSA bargaining unit employees nationwide to help the union identify the areas of the current contract that members want changed, edited or added as well as gather information about working conditions in SSA offices across the country. The survey results led to the discovery that stress, temperature levels and indoor air quality were the three top areas of concern for employees. "We offered extensive proposals in each of these areas based on the survey results from our members," stated Skwierczynski. "But management responded with no substantive counterproposals during negotiations."

AFGE is bargaining in good faith, however, the agency has not changed its initial position—to decrease employee benefits, increase management's power and weaken the union. The following are just a few of the proposals that have been on the table:

- The union proposed more employee involvement in workplace decisions. If employees are empowered, they will have more buy-in. The agency flat out opposed this.
- The agency wants to eliminate all union office space as well as a radical reduction in official time and all non-employee union officials to be banned from the worksite.
- AFGE wants to restore fairness to the grievance and arbitration process while management wants to make it more difficult for employees and their AFGE representatives. Short time frames and restrictive rules would keep many employees from getting their due process.

The agency's proposals to add burdensome procedures and increase costs would be detrimental to employees.

- Management wants more control over employee leave, including more authority to severely limit flextime, telework and credit hour use.
- Several years ago, AFGE and SSA also negotiated an agreement on domestic violence. The Union wants that agreement put into the next contract, but management hasn't acted on that proposal either.
- Annual leave requests for full weeks and for days around holidays (when not all requests can be honored), has been discussed, as well. Responding to the interests of its members, AFGE proposed rotating leave rosters for most SSA components with seniority-based approval for

other components, but the agency rejected that idea without any explanation.

"SSA management's attitude at the table has been hostile. The union has introduced new proposals on behalf of our members and management has not been willing to engage in any constructive discussion," explained Skwierczynski. "A radical change in attitude from the agency is what's need to break this log jam in negotiations. At this point, the agency is trying to take away AFGE's representation and take away the voice of its employees. SSA employees need to demand a change in attitude from the agency and they need to question why the agency sees fit to try to take away their representation. It's time for our members to get angry." ●

And Then There Was One...

President Obama signed Executive Order 13522: Creating Labor-Management Forums to Improve Delivery of Government Services on December 9, 2009. The forums are a way of involving employees and their unions in working together with management to more efficiently deliver government services, build employee morale and job satisfaction, and improve the labor-management relationship—something that AFGE fully supports.

The Executive Order required federal agencies to submit a plan to the National Council on Federal Labor-Management Relations (National Council) saying how they would implement the Order. The National Council was charged with certifying the plans. To date, all but one federal agency in which AFGE has members has an approved plan in place and is forging ahead to improve government services. And which is the only federal agency that doesn't have an approved plan? That's right—the Social Security Administration.

AFGE Council 220 President Witold Skwierczynski explained the log jam, "Fifty of 51 agency forums have been approved. Social Security is still the only federal agency without a certified plan. It's obvious that Commissioner Astrue has no interest in implementing this order. Commissioner Astrue and his staff are deliberately ignoring this presidential directive."

The Executive Order requires that each agency head to submit an implementation plan to the National Council Workgroup in consultation with AFGE representatives, however, SSA management has submitted plans to the group without consulting with the union. "No such consultation has occurred with AFGE... despite the fact that AFGE represents 96 percent of employees who are in bargaining units in SSA," explained AFGE National President John Gage in a recent letter to the National Council Workgroup.

The plan submitted by SSA management "is deficient in many areas. The worst aspect of the SSA plan is their absolute refusal to meet with AFGE to discuss and collaborate on an AFGE-SSA forum plan and structure," according to Gage. In addition, the plan unilaterally limits the topics that labor-management forums can discuss in SSA.

AFGE Field Services and Education Department's Labor Relations Specialist Terry Rosen, who has been an active part of this project, explains that, "The forums give us a chance to be more involved. They allow us to do more than just file grievances. The success of the forums depends on the agencies and their cooperation and willingness to work with the exclusive representative of their bargaining unit employees. Clearly, SSA management isn't interested in the process put forth by the Executive Order. It's an embarrassment to the agency and it is unfortunate, unnecessary delay for our members in getting the work place improvements they deserve." ●

What's the latest with AFGE's TSA campaign?

As of Sept. 20, 2010, AFGE is awaiting the full Federal Labor Relations Authority's ruling on our petition calling for a union election for 40,000 Transportation Security Officers nationwide. AFGE filed an appeal with the full Authority back in June after a Regional Director dismissed our petition, saying an election could not take place before TSOs are given collective bargaining rights. AFGE is optimistic that the full Authority will see the distinction between bargaining rights and AFGE's representational role at TSA in the past eight years absent collective bargaining. When the full FLRA rejected AFGE's first TSA election petition in 2003, then FLRA member and current Chair Carole Pope dissented



from the majority opinion, asserting that there are many things a union representative can do for workers absent collective bargaining. AFGE is hopeful that the

FLRA will issue a decision by the end of September.

While AFGE is seeking a union election, we also are aggressively pursuing collective bargaining rights for TSOs legislatively. H.R.1881, a bill that would give TSOs bargaining rights and transfer them from a controversial pay system to the General Schedule, is pending in Congress and we're working to get it to the floor for a vote in the House of Representatives. We're also pursuing a companion bill in the Senate.

AFGE will keep meeting the challenges in TSA on behalf of our members and continue to grow its 12,000 TSA dues-paying members. Go to www.tsaunion.net for the latest information. ●

Federal Prison Officers' Union Rejects Agency's Claim on Stalled Medical Furlough Policy

AFGE Council of Prison Locals remains willing to immediately negotiate high-priority issues

AFGE and its Council of Prison Locals (CPL) strongly reject the Federal Bureau of Prisons' (BOP) claim that the union is responsible for an outdated policy regarding the handling of furloughed inmates for medical treatment. A recent Office of Inspector General (OIG) report revealed the current policy does not require BOP staff to notify victims and witnesses when an inmate is released on medical furlough.

"The agency's claim that the union is responsible for an outdated policy is absurd," said CPL President Bryan Lowry. "They could have designated this as a high-priority issue and moved it to the front of the line, at which time we would have quickly negotiated a new policy. Instead, the agency blamed the union after the OIG report exposed a management deficiency," Lowry said.

The report states BOP drafted a furlough policy in 2003 that would require notification of victims and witnesses when an inmate is released on medical furlough; however, that policy has yet to be implemented. In the report, BOP indicated it expected to complete negotiations for this policy by Dec. 31, 2017, a timeframe the OIG called "excessive and unacceptable." The report also noted that this type of delay by BOP can impact victims' rights and the ability to safely and securely operate a facility.

In a letter to Attorney General Eric Holder, AFGE National President John Gage said, "The Bureau's attempt to blame AFGE for BOP's failure to enact a new furlough policy is outrageous. It is absolutely untrue that AFGE objected—or would ever object—to a request by management to deal quickly with a high-priority issue.

"This travesty is yet another example of the game-playing and manipulation by management officials at the Bureau regarding safety issues for correctional officers," Gage concluded. ●



Annual **Human Rights Training** Conference a **Success**

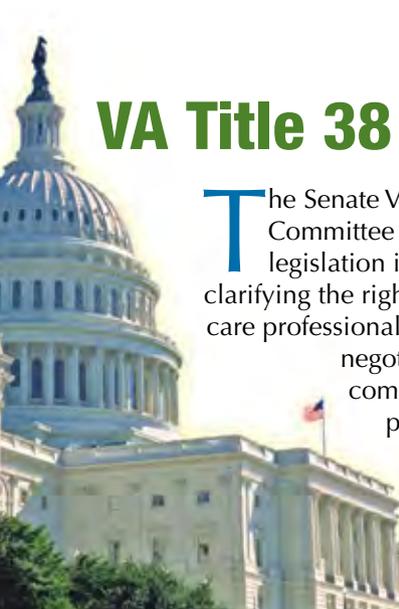


The Women's and Fair Practices Department of AFGE hosted its annual Human Rights Training Conference in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Taking place in the Taj Mahal hotel, the four-day conference that kicked off August 9 featured seven of their popular classes from past conferences in addition to two new ones—"EEO—DC Government" and "Work Life".

Hundreds of participants were trained on issues such as equal employment opportunities and collective bargaining. AFGE stressed to attendees that there is a need to "combine the strength of our communities with the strength of labor" as the organization progresses towards the elimination of infringement on worker's rights.

"We are very pleased with the turn out this year," said Augusta Thomas, National Vice President of Women's and Fair Practices. "Providing these necessary resources in such a great capacity is what we pride ourselves on and we are making great strides."

VA Title 38 Compensation Bill Moves Forward on Capitol Hill



The Senate Veterans Affairs Committee approved legislation in August clarifying the right of VA health care professionals to grieve and negotiate over some compensation disputes. The committee's vote was cheered by AFGE, which represents over

200,000 VA employees, most of whom work in the Veterans Healthcare Administration, VHA.

The union applauded Senator Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio), who introduced the language as an amendment at the August 5th mark up of the Senate VA Committee.

"VA health care professionals are committed men and women, who have chosen to dedicate their careers serving those who've sacrificed for our nation," said J. David Cox, AFGE national secretary-treasurer and a former VA nurse for

more than 23 years. "They deserve the ability to seek redress when pay laws and regulations are not followed, just like their counterparts in other federally-run medical facilities."

Under current law, VA health care professionals classified as Title 38 employees do not have the same rights as their counterparts in the Department of Defense or Bureau of Prisons to use their bargaining rights to enforce pay laws and regulations. The current law hampers VA doctors, dentists, registered nurses, physicians' assistants, chiropractors, optometrists, podiatrists, and dental auxiliaries from exercising their collective bargaining rights when management withholds overtime or weekend premium pay, or wage survey data or does not properly implement performance pay systems enacted by Congress.

Senator Brown's amendment will allow unions representing Title 38 VA employees to negotiate over some compensation matters, similar to the bargaining rights of Title 5 VA and DoD clinicians.

In addition to providing equity between Title 38 VA health care professionals and their counterparts in other agencies, the legislation will level the playing field for Title 38 and Title 5 employees in the same agency. Without passage of this legislation, VA employees working side by side lack equal rights. For example, registered nurses cannot enforce their rights to overtime pay while licensed practical nurses have that right. Likewise, VA psychiatrists have no recourse when pay rules are violated, yet VA psychologists working in the same mental health settings have the ability to exercise their collective bargaining rights under Title 5.

The bill also could have benefits with respect to the VA's ability to recruit and retain quality talent. "In the fierce marketplace for top talent, the VA must be able to compete with the lure of the private sector, where pay and benefits far exceed those in the federal government" said Cox.

The legislation is set to be sent to the full Senate for a vote. Companion legislation HR 5543 previously was introduced in the House VA Committee by Chairman Bob Filner, (D-Calif.). The House VA Committee plans to hold a hearing on the legislation following the summer recess. ●

GO GREEN

with New AFGE Commuter Benefit

AFGE has expanded its Commuter Benefit program for union members. We recently partnered with VPSI, a commuter vanpool program that already is available to federal employees in several locations. VPSI offers AFGE members who join one of their vanpools a \$100 US savings bond after their first anniversary of the date that they join a VPSI vanpool, as well as information on all qualified mass transit alternatives.

The enhanced commuter benefits program provides several options. An AFGE member could contact VPSI and provide information about the location of his/her home and his or her workplace destination, and VPSI would determine if there was an existing vanpool that would suit the needs of the AFGE member. If so, the AFGE member could then join the existing vanpool, and contact their agency representatives to determine the exact amount that their agency would reimburse them.

If there is no existing vanpool that can serve the AFGE member, another option would be the creation of a new vanpool that could do so. VPSI supplies the vans and the logistical support, including insurance, vehicle maintenance, fuel purchasing card, etc. The van itself is leased to a volunteer vanpool member-driver. The driver calculates the monthly expenses, and the vanpool riders would divide the costs amongst themselves. Any employer-paid subsidy that may be available is handled through a transit voucher used to pay the rider's monthly vanpool expense.

With more than 5,000 vanpools nationwide, VPSI vanpools already exist in many locations across the USA. VPSI helps to assemble commuters with common transportation routes, and assist with the establishment of new vanpools. They will be happy to discuss vanpool arrangements with any AFGE member. Just email your name, department/agency name, home and work addresses and telephone number to unionvanpool@vpsiinc.com and we will contact you to further assess your needs.



Sound, effective and legitimate credit counseling is needed now by many AFGE families who are struggling to get out of the debt trap. In fact, according to a Federal Reserve study, about 43 percent of U.S. families spend more than they earn.

Lisa Johnson, a member of the AFGE Local 709 and a psychologist at a Federal Corrections Institute in Colorado, was among them. By turning to one of her AFGE benefits, the Union Plus Credit

Counseling Program, Johnson was able to stop the collection calls, and she's now on the road to financial recovery.

"I knew the Union Plus Credit Counseling Program had to be reputable if the union was backing it. I have friends who regretted using some of the other commercial, so-called debt management companies. In fact, they ended up owing even more than they did originally. I'm glad I went with Union Plus program," says Johnson, a 10-year union member.

AFGE members can access free credit and budget counseling either on the phone 24/7 or in person at more than 100 locations nationwide. Your free session includes:

- Complete financial review, budget analysis and credit management counseling
- Assistance in budgeting or advice on sources of additional income
- Advice on how to work with creditors
- A written Action Plan that summarizes your financial situation, provides a budget and timeline for reaching your debt management and repayment goals, and restates action items, and
- Referrals social service organization in your area, if appropriate.

For those who need additional assistance, a Debt Management Plan (DMP) is available. The DMP allows participants to make one monthly payment to the provider of the credit counseling program, which in turn, pays all creditors. Union Plus waives the set-up fee for AFGE members for an initial DMP. And, after the first year

AFGE Member Gets Out of Debt with Union Plus Credit Counseling



of successful participation, 12 months of DMP fees are reimbursed to union members. Johnson has been enrolled in the Union Plus-backed DMP for more than one year. The program helped re-negotiate her debt to creditors and set up a payment plan that Johnson could handle. In fact, the single monthly payment she makes now is less than the combined amount of all the bills she had been struggling to make.

The plan has brought not only financial relief for this single mother but also much-needed peace of mind. To ensure a financially secure future, Johnson, who holds a doctorate of psychology, is taking advantage of financial education offered through the Debt Management Program, including free webinars and trainings.

"I think more union members should know about union benefits like the Credit Counseling program," says Johnson. "Being a union member offers me a lot, including access to additional professional training and meetings. I'm glad that I am a part of the union and I am thankful for representation and the unique benefits that I am entitled to."

The Union Plus Credit Counseling Program is just one of many unique benefits offered by AFGE aimed at helping member's families during this difficult economic downswing. If you have had an AFGE Union Plus Mortgage, Credit Card or Insurance policy for at least one year and are facing financial difficulty, the Union SAFE program may offer assistance. Unemployment, disability, and hospital care grants are available to Union Plus program participants. Even if you do not participate in a Union Plus program, help still may be available through education grants, free foreclosure prevention counseling, free bankruptcy counseling and a free medical bill negotiation service. And AFGE members can establish or rebuild credit history with the AFGE Union Plus Secured Credit Card. ●



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- AFGE's Authors' Night featuring **Deputy General Counsel Chuck Hobbie, Field Services and Education Department Director Bill Fletcher, and Contract Analyst Tim Shorrock**
- **AFGE Legislative Representative John Threlkeld** discuss the union's work on Capitol Hill to promote insourcing and good government

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