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AFGE *Advocate*

March 2009
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President's Remarks

HAPPY SPRING! After a long and brutal Winter (one of the coldest these old bones can recall in a long time), signs are beginning to show that warmth is on the way. As miserable as it has been, it has not deterred your Union from working hard on many fronts, and things are certainly looking up.

Our yearly Legislative trip was a tremendous success, as we met with all of our Michigan delegation and reminded them of the great work we do here at the Arsenal, and, of course, stressing that we should be remembered when it comes time to look at a pay raise for next year. Please read Ed Klein's comments to get a broader view of the Political situation.

We have also been very hard at work on the Contract Renegotiation, and tremendous progress has been made. Hopefully, by the time of our next Newsletter, you will have been able to read, review and ratify the agreement which will serve us well for many years. I think you will be pleased at what we have accomplished.

Tiger tickets have arrived for those newest members who have joined our ranks since the beginning of the year. Please call the office (46102) to pick out the game you wish to go to. And for our loyal supporters, never fear...a Tiger bus trip is in the works. When we did this a couple of years ago, we had an absolute blast! Plans for a huge Summer picnic are also being discussed. As always, we welcome your comments and suggestions.

As I'm sure we all know, there are big changes in the works here at our beloved Detroit Arsenal. And with change inevitably comes some discomfort and growing pains. Office space is a rare and valuable commodity, and the parking situation is worse than it has ever been. Many people have been asked to relocate. And I think that once again, our willingness to make sacrifices shows that we are the best and most dedicated workforce around. However, remember that your Union is here for you if issues or situations become too difficult to deal with. Please get in touch and we will do what we can to rectify the situation.

So, I wish you a great Spring and I look forward to seeing everyone in the near future...for discussions on the Contract or any issues in general. Take care! In Solidarity,

Dan

Meeting Notice



Our Next Scheduled General
Membership Meeting:

Wednesday

April 15, 2009

Detroit Arsenal
Building 230, Room 137W
4:00 p.m.

2009 College Scholarships

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Applications are still being accepted for the 2009 College Scholarship Program sponsored by FEEA and AFGE Local 1658. Applications must be forwarded directly to FEEA, and must be postmarked by March 27, 2009. For further information contact Mary Jo Winfield, AFGE Local 1658 Executive Vice President, extension 45295.



**Applications must be
postmarked by
March 27, 2009**

FERS Sick Leave Equity Act

Congressman Jim Moran (D-VA) and Congressman Frank Wolf (R-VA, introduced legislation on February 10, 2009 entitled FERS Sick Leave Equity Act. The legislation provides Federal employees under the FERS retirement system a sick leave benefit equal to that of employees under the CSRS retirement system.

The benefit adds any unused sick leave to the number of years an employee has worked for the purposes of determining retirement annuities. The current “use or lose” sick leave system in FERS does not promote the accrual of sick leave; rather, it encourages employees to call in sick during the time just prior to retirement.

John Gage, President American Federation of Government Employees stated “AFGE strongly endorses Rep. Moran’s legislation, which would correct a longstanding inequity between CSRS and FERS. The incentive to save sick leave for retirement credit later is good for the government while the employee is working, and is an appropriate reward for dedicated employees upon their retirement.”

In a recent survey of FERS and CSRS employees, 85% of CSRS employees said they conserved as much sick leave as possible. On the other hand, 75% of FERS employees said they would use as much sick leave as possible during their last years.

Implementation of this legislation is projected to save taxpayers \$68 million per year.

2009 Legislative Conference

By Ed Klein, Area Vice President/Legislative Committee Chair

An AFGE Local 1658 contingent of President Dan Martin, and AVP's Vernessar Morris Lee, and Ed Klein attended this year's National Legislative Conference in Washington DC. Despite the dire economic crisis facing our Country, in my ten years of attending these Conferences, I have never felt a more upbeat, positive mood of attendees and in the City itself. This was of course because we elected our AFGE endorsed candidate for President and also made key gains in the Congress. We believe that after eight long years of fighting an Administration that tried to contract out as many of our jobs as possible, take away our collective bargaining rights (NSPS) and fought our pay raises every year, we now have an Administration and a Congress that will appreciate the value and worth of Federal employee contributions to our Nation.

This year our group met with both Michigan Senators and each of the nine Michigan Congressmen and Congresswomen that represent Local 1658 members. Pictured below: President Dan Martin, Detroit Congressman and Chair of the House Judiciary Committee John Conyers, and Area Vice President Ed Klein.



Legislative Conference Continued

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In addition to the subjects of our annual pay raise and the increasing costs of our Insurance premiums, our discussions with Legislators focused on four issues:

1) Privatization of Government Jobs: After the disasters of privatization over the last eight years (Halliburton/Walter Reed/Blackwater, etc) I believe we have turned the corner on this issue! The mood in the Congress and with the new Administration is that Privatization of our jobs in the long run costs the taxpayers more money and delivers fewer results. We made great gains with last year's Defense Bill to slow down Privatization in the DoD and hope to expand on those gains this year. Senator Barbara Mikulski of Maryland has introduced Legislation that would not only stop the race toward privatization but would force Agencies to bring work previously contracted out back "In House". Most Legislators we met with were receptive to signing on to this Legislation.



2) NSPS: President Obama, before his election, sent a letter to National President Gage stating that if elected, he would either radically change or do away with NSPS completely. The Legislators we met with we were in agreement with this plan.

3) Airport Screeners: While this issue does not impact our Local directly, it is #1 on AFGE's Legislative list. If we can overturn the Bush Administration's ban on Screeners joining AFGE, it will mean thousands of new members!

4) Employee Free Choice Act: Again this issue will not impact us directly, but as proud members of the AFL-CIO and the Labor Movement, this is Legislation priority #1. If passed, it will make joining a Union much easier for private sector employees.

AFGE Local 1658 is proud of the results realized from our efforts at the Legislative Conferences and our legislative efforts which go on all year long back here in Michigan.

Don't Wait Too Long!

By Paul Veselenak, Area Vice President

One of the most common mistakes employees make when faced with a problem with their management is to wait too long to seek advice, help and support from the Union. Again and again in recent years I've seen the Union notified of a problem or a dispute involving one of our bargaining unit members only after the situation has already become quite serious. At that point it becomes difficult for the employee to avoid suffering some kind of negative consequences.

Waiting too long to address a problem before it becomes more serious can apply to a number of different situations. These situations include (but are not necessarily limited to): disputes over performance ratings, disagreements over performance standards and objectives, workplace conditions that adversely affect an employee's health or safety, leave usage issues and disciplinary problems. Let me just discuss two of those situations: disputes over performance ratings and disciplinary issues.

Disputes Over Performance Ratings

Frequently, the Union only becomes involved in a performance rating issue after the employee has already been given a rating he/she disagrees with. Many times that unfavorable performance rating isn't totally unexpected and comes at the end of a series of preceding events over a period of weeks and even months before the rating was given.

Sometimes these preceding events start at the very beginning of the rating period when an employee is given performance objectives that are unrealistic, vague, unattainable or otherwise flawed. One example is being given a performance objective such as "take all mandatory training", which can be met, but for which there is no clearly defined way to exceed. If you receive too many standards that are flawed or simply can't be exceeded, don't be surprised at the end of the rating process if your rating suffers as a result.

If you feel your proposed performance objectives are defective, flawed or unrealistic you need to address them when they are first given to you - NOT at the end of the rating period. This includes contacting the Union if necessary. We have helped many employees get adjustments in objectives at the beginning of a rating period, eliminating problems with those objectives at the end of the rating period.

A midpoint review is crucial. Know when your review is due, and if it has not taken place, request one in writing. Pay attention and deal immediately with any negative comments on your performance to date, do not wait until months later when the

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Don't Wait...Continued

rating period is over. Have management clarify if they are unhappy with your performance and, if so, what exactly you need to improve on. In any of these cases it doesn't hurt to share your concerns with the Union as soon as possible.

If you are proactive and attempt to address performance issues as soon as they arise (and document your attempt) then, if you do receive what you consider to be an unfair rating at the very end of the rating period you are in a much better position to challenge and overturn that rating.

Disciplinary Issues:

My experience with disciplinary issues is that while they seem to occur abruptly and with no advance warning, in many cases there were actually warning signs that something was wrong well before an employee faces actual formal disciplinary action. Watch out for unfavorable verbal or written statements from management that indicate they see you as having some kind of a problem, or ongoing personality clashes with managers over a variety of different issues over a period of time. The issues involved in these clashes might seem minor, even trivial, but **if** these incidents persist over a period of time and don't stop **that is not a good sign**. Another bad sign is when your supervisor doesn't appear to trust you or your work performance and keeps asking you questions on items that appear to be fairly routine.

Other signs to watch out for are informal counseling or requests to sign a document admitting some kind of responsibility for alleged misbehavior. You have the right to request union representation if YOU (not your management) feel that some action or meeting may result in disciplinary action. You would be surprised how many times an employee's failure to challenge such counseling or adverse documentation ends up being cited, some months down the road when the employee IS formally disciplined.

If an employee disagrees with the reason for the informal counseling he/she should consult with the Union and go on record as challenging it. Likewise, if an employee is receiving verbal or written communications from managers indicating that a possible disciplinary issue might be raised in the future, the employee should contact the Union as soon as possible.

Remember that you don't need to wait until a situation has become so serious it that harms your health or you are faced with an actual formal disciplinary action. Rather, come to the Union for help and advice **before the situation becomes worse**. You can come informally at any time and seek our assistance. If you don't like our advice or our proposed course of action, you don't have to take it. Our help is free and confidential. Don't wait too long!



AFGE Local 1658

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Roster of Union Representatives March 2009

Dan Martin, President.....	574-6102
Mary Jo Winfield, Executive Vice President.....	574-5295
Ed Klein, VP, Bldg 231.....	574-6807
Martin Robinson, VP, Bldg 231.....	574-5343
Paul Veselenak, VP, Bldg 230.....	574-7632
Deborah Durr, Steward, Bldg 230.....	574-4116
Wes Crickard, Steward, Bldg 230.....	574-7042
Vernessar Morris-Lee, VP, Bldg 229.....	574-7228
Karen Pate, Steward, Bldg 229.....	753-2766
Robert Graham, VP, Bldg 200, 201, 210, 212, 215, 252.....	574-8968/6175
Ron Grigsby, VP, Bldgs 203, 205, 219, 232, SANGB.....	574-5564/5295
Bruce Storace, Steward, Police.....	574-5564
Denise Woods, Steward, SANGB.....	307-2621
Darrell Ball, Steward, Lima Tank Plant.....	(419) 221-9543
Joe Manning, Steward, Commissary.....	307-4124
Fred Napier, Steward, Fire.....	574-6021
Louis Opalka, Senior Director of Labor Relations.....	574-5307
Jane Gabler, Women's/Fair Practices Coordinator.....	574-7759
Mike Johnson, Veterans Affairs.....	574-7518

Internal Union Officers:

MaryAnn Rheaume, Treasurer.....	574-7923
Mary Lee, Secretary.....	574-6706
LeeAnne Filary, Trustee.....	574-7407
Malcolm Simpson, Trustee.....	574-7935
Greg Donahoe, Trustee.....	574-6001
Echo Hunt, Office Manager.....	574-6102

