

ENOUGH SAID!

Newsletter of

AFGE LOCAL 2505

Representing SSA Field Office Employees in Arkansas & Oklahoma

June, 2011 – Volume VI, No. 1

NOTICE OF ELECTION!

You are hereby notified, in compliance with the constitution and by-laws of AFGE Local 2505, that nominations for Officers of AFGE Local 2505 are being solicited.

Nominations are being solicited for the office of President, Executive Vice President, Secretary-Treasurer, Vice President for Arkansas and Vice President for Oklahoma. The President, Executive Vice President, Secretary-Treasurer are delegates by virtue of office to all caucuses and conventions of AFGE (AFGE Local 2505 Constitution, Article VII).

Self-nominations are permitted. If you are nominating someone other than yourself, you must include a statement, signed by the nominee that they accept your nomination. Nominations do not have to be seconded.

All nomination must be made in writing and by mail. Nominations must be mailed to:

Attention: AFGE Local 2505 Officer Nominations
American Federation of Government Employees (AFL-CIO),
District 9
3000 Tower Drive, Suite 708
Del City, OK 73115

Nominations must include the name and address of the individual making the nomination, the name of the person being nominated, AND the position for which that person is being nominated.

Nominations MUST be received by close of business July 15, 2011.

Qualifications for office are: be a member in good standing of AFGE Local 2505; be a member of AFGE Local 2505 for one year immediately preceding the closing of the nomination process; not be a member of any labor organization not affiliated with the AFL-CIO. No candidate may run for more than one office.

The term of office is 3 years ending with the installation of officers "at the earliest practicable date after the elections are completed."

If there are contested positions, a mail ballot election will be conducted after the close of nominations by Mr. Sam Craven, AFGE National Representative, in accordance with the mail ballot procedures contained in the AFGE Constitution, Appendix A.

Election protests must be made to Mr. Sam Craven prior to, during, or within ten days after the election.

He shall consider and/or investigate the complaint and attempt to resolve the protest(s) or to render a decision within 15 days after receipt of the complaint. An extension of time up to 30 additional days is

permissible for him to render a decision, if the complainant(s) is (are) by certified mail of this extension.

In addition, notice is being given that a secret ballot will be sent to you at least 15 days after the date of this notice. The ballot is:

In the event that a delegate by virtue of office is unable to attend an AFGE caucus or convention, the votes of the delegate(s) who is(are) unable to attend will be carried by proxy with the delegate attending that caucus or convention. In the event that more than one delegate is attending, the proxy votes shall be divided equally among the attending delegates. _____ Yes _____ No

MEETING NOTICE

**There will be a General Membership Meeting of
AFGE Local 2505**

on

Saturday – July 16, 2011

Time: 9:30 AM

at the

Holiday Inn City Center

Fayetteville Room

700 Rogers Avenue

Fort Smith, Arkansas 72901

Agenda

Call to Order

Secretary's Report

Treasurer's Report

**Reconciliation 2010 Budget; 2011
Budget**

Legislative Report

Litigation Report

New Business

Unfinished Business

Adjournment

Legislative Update

There has been a lot going on.

On the plus side, the efforts of AFGE and so many others averted a furlough. On the down side, that was only the first of the attacks on Federal Employees which AFGE is fighting.

AFGE wrote to the chairman and ranking member of the Senate Budget Committee, asking them to reject proposals that would sharply cut pay and benefits for federal employees. Federal employees hired after 1983 have already paid 12% of salary to get a benefit as good as those older or hired before 1983 when a new law took effect to require a greater contribution from employees. But under one of the proposals that has been floating around and gaining traction – the Simpson-Bowles plan – these employees would have to fork over 18% of salary toward retirement. This is on top of the pay freeze that is in place this year and next and pending proposals to freeze federal pay for five more years. The Simpson-Bowles plan would turn the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) into a voucher program that would result in employees paying 63% of their health insurance premiums rather than the 33% they pay today. The plan would also cut the government's share of insurance premiums for federal retirees.

Rep. **Tom Marino**, R-Pa., recently introduced a bill that would stop most federal hiring until the federal deficit is eliminated. The Federal Hiring Freeze Act of 2011, H.R. 1779, would affect all federal agencies except for the U.S. Postal Service and Postal Regulatory Commission; federal law-enforcement positions; the reassignment of personnel within the same agency; short-term, seasonal hiring; or transitional positions involving a new presidential administration. Marino said the bill calls for a “responsible” freeze on the federal workforce, allowing for what he calls “common-sense exceptions” during times of war or for law enforcement, and national security concerns. Because somebody still needs to do the work, the bill, if passed, will most likely lead to

wholesale outsourcing of federal jobs. Outsourcing is 25 percent more expensive than doing the work in-house, according to the Defense Department, which does the most outsourcing in the federal government. DoD is implementing a similar plan proposed by Marino. The agency is capping the workforce at fiscal 2010 levels, which will lead to the elimination of tens of thousands of positions. The Army currently allows only one civilian employee to be hired for every three who depart, and only in special circumstances.

With all these attacks on our benefits and our rights, YOUR VOICE is very important!! PLEASE go to www.afge.org. On the right hand side of the home page, you will see a link to

Take Action – Fight Back!

and

SIGN UP FOR EMAIL ALERTS

PLEASE sign up there.

The Union can NOT send you emails or messages at work that ask to you contact your Congressman or Senators to ask them to vote for or oppose legislation. Government phones, emails, computers, postage and duty time cannot be used for lobbying. You can do something to turn back the attacks on your benefits and financial well-being and be a part of the Union's grassroots lobbying effort. You can let your elected representatives know that you and your family deserve to be treated decently and fairly! Your voice can and will be heard if take action!



We are not without supporters who appreciate what we do as Federal Employees. Senator Tom Harkins wrote a very nice Op-Ed piece:

Unsung Heroes: Recognizing Our Public Servants

Sen. Tom Harkin

They will probably never see their names in lights or walk on a red carpet, but our public servants -- from police officers to firefighters, from sanitation crews to social security personnel, from teachers to postal workers -- are the unsung heroes of our communities. They have dedicated their careers to making our lives better, and for that, they deserve our respect and gratitude. Therefore, I call on my colleagues and friends all over the country to take a moment during this Public Service Recognition Week (May 1-7) to honor those who dedicate their lives to the greater good.

Throughout our history, some of our most storied leaders have recognized the important role a robust civil service plays in crafting a great nation, and both political parties have a long tradition of encouraging young men and women to enter public service.

President Kennedy, for example, was a forceful advocate for public service. It has been 50 years, but I can still remember the words he spoke during his first state of the union address just 10 days after taking office:

"Let the public service be a proud and lively career. And let every man and woman who works in any area of our national government, in any branch, at any level, be able to say with pride and with honor in future years: 'I served the United States Government in that hour of our nation's need.'"

Like so many before him, President Kennedy inspired a generation of young men and women to enter public service at the federal, state, and local level, and we are a better nation for it.

But times have changed, and there is a disturbing new breed of elected official that has decided to play politics by scapegoating hardworking American who serve the public good. Opportunists in Wisconsin, my home state of Iowa, and across the country are now

attacking public sector workers blaming them for our fiscal woes.

However, the arguments they make are all smoke and mirrors. The truth is that our public servants are not to blame for the fiscal predicament that some states find themselves in. That was caused by the financial crisis, and we can hardly blame teachers, firefighters, sanitation crews or social security personnel for that.

Some seem to forget that our public servants are hardworking, middle-class people. They are our friends and neighbors, and no good can come from attacking them. It just distracts us from the real economic challenges facing middle class families who are finding it harder and harder to put a roof over their heads, gas in the tank and food on the table.

For the good of the country, it is time to stop trying to tear people down and start having an adult conversation about the future of the American middle class. We need to put policies in place that build real economic security for working families. Everyone deserves to earn decent wages and benefits and have the opportunity for a safe and secure retirement. And everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect on the job -- especially the public servants who work to make all our lives better.

Fortunately, Public Service Recognition Week presents a real opportunity for leaders on both sides of the aisle to show their support for our public servants. There have been events in communities all over the country honoring our local heroes, and I am hopeful that, even in this time of budget battles and election season posturing, everyone can take a few minutes before the week is over to recognize the important contributions that these hardworking people make to our families, our communities, and our nation.

LOCAL 2505 UPDATE

Since our last newsletter, Fort Smith and Russellville have joined the AFGE Local 2505 family. WELCOME!!

Our membership has grown from about 35% to almost 62%. That is extraordinary for a two state local in which most offices have less than 30 employees!

We try very hard to please! Feel free to let us know when we are doing something you like as well as something that you do not.

REPRESENTATION REPORT

We had to file grievances to get SSA to start flextime and AWS in Russellville and Fort Smith.

Besides visiting offices, the Local has been very busy with grievances. The administration leave for weather grievance in Fort Smith was resolved by converting all charges to leave to admin leave. The grievances in Ada and Ardmore are pending arbitration. Several 2009 appraisal grievances were settled in Oklahoma. One is pending arbitration. Now, we are doing several 2010 appraisal grievances. Our appraisal grievance successes in Oklahoma haven't been duplicated in Arkansas. If you ask me, SSA is still smarting over LOSING the Little Rock 3 arbitrations. (That was two 90 day suspensions and a removal.) If Area 1 management doesn't want to resolve anything, they will just lose more.

We reached a settlement of the Poteau 8 grievances!

We have an arbitration scheduled on a removal in Stillwater; we are in the middle of arbitration on dues withholding and revocation issues. We have arbitrations which must be scheduled on lost use or lose in Tulsa; admin leave denials in Hugo; appraisals in Pine Bluff and Tulsa.

There are still several grievances pending at various steps of the grievance process: awards, appraisal, AWOL charges, not being permitted to work credit hours, medical documentation to use annual leave, temporary promotion because an SR was doing appeals,.

The Local has settled non-selection EEO complaints with 120 day promotions / transfers. The Local has also settled reasonable accommodation complaints. The problem with most reasonable accommodation issues is a disagreement (1) that there is a documented

condition that requires the requested accommodation and (2) the employee must, despite the condition, be able to perform the essential elements of their job. In the accommodation case settled by the Local, SSA agreed to define the CR position as: working on 1695s, 1696s, 721s, 827s, Medical CDRs, Snow letters, answering the admin line, scheduling appointments on the phone, back up greeter, processing 3441s, 3368s, 454s, 5202s for CDRs.

The Local is representing several other employees in EEO complaints who were terminated by SSA just before they were converted to career conditional when the FCIP program ended. One has already settled with the termination being replaced by a resignation. The Local settled the EEO complaint of another employee who was a Schedule A employee. The removal was replaced with a resignation and the employee received a cash settlement. The Local was representing another employee in a hostile work environment / harassment EEO complaint. The employee had a panic attack just thinking about coming back to the office to show her new baby off. She resigned and withdrew her EEO complaint. The Local is representing an employee whose request for administrative time to attend OPM approved training is pending.

It does say much for SSA as an employer when so many employees who SSA fires, rather than return to a horrible work place, opt to settle their complaint for a resignation so they won't have a removal hanging over them when they apply at other federal agencies who treat their employees like human beings with reasonable performance expectations!

The Local has settled several Unfair Labor Practice charges filed because SSA refused to provide information.

The Local has settled a counseling grievance with SSA stating the counseling was not for just cause.

The Local was prepared to testify for an employee who was denied unemployment. SSA

didn't show up to contest the claim; therefore, the Local's testimony wasn't needed.

There has been a dramatic uptick in the number of incidents reports. A CR was assaulted by a claimant in the office. A claimant tried to commit suicide in an office's public restroom. A claimant made threats against an office, the DDS and the President which the Area I Office didn't think needed to be reported to the Secret Service or the Federal Protective Service. An email from the Local resulted in an appropriate notification of the authorities.

The Local has filed several Union-Management Grievances concerning how different offices have either failed to purge employees' SF07B Extension Files; over-purged them (as in destroying all the underlying documentation that supported an appraisal being grieved); and included copies of counseling, grievances and EEO settlements in the 7B.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Since our last newsletter, we have had three new Local Representatives join our ranks: Dawn Whorton in Russellville, James Short in Sherwood and Christina Monks in Tulsa.

A BIG WELCOME to them!

Please come to the Local meeting in Little Rock next month to meet them!

Reps Christina Monks and Angela Crawford have been to AFGE's EEO training. Christina has already taken on several EEO complaints and grievances. She will be going to AFGE's Human Rights Training Conference in Atlanta in August. (Before you say anything, we acknowledge AFGE sends its reps to great places at great times of year: e.g., Atlanta in August! ☺)

I want to thank all of you who have responded so generously to Emails with the subject line: Member in Need! Your kindness and generosity in donating leave is greatly appreciated by those employees and makes a huge financial difference in their lives and the lives of their families.

For the first time in our Local, we are getting METAL DETECTORS and an additional guard to operate them. That will be in Oklahoma City. We hope that pilot will be expanded to other SSA Field Offices, large and small.

All the equipment in the world isn't going to address our biggest problem: too much work and unrealistic management expectations!

Without overtime and with the continued staffing and hiring freeze, there is only going to be more stress. Look at your management team: young and inexperienced. Hired since 2006, in the good times of increasing staff, lots of overtime, details, promotions and making the goals year end-year out. They are completely unprepared for what faces us. They have neither the people skills nor life experiences that make them compassionate or caring or good leaders and motivators who don't know how to stand up for their subordinates when unrealistic demands are placed on them.

What do they do when you are buried with interviews, appointments and phone calls? They send you a dozen emails asking for status on all of each of your lists! Heaven forbid they help out or tell their boss that you are going to be interviewing all day and won't be able to respond to the status request right away. Nope. They dump everything on you then cop an attitude and accuse you of being disrespectful when you don't acknowledge their email!

The Union is pretty good about fixing a specific problem: like the DM taking money from the staff; like the DM letting their dog defecate on the carpet in the office on weekends; like the AD not wanting to report threats to FPS or the Secret Service. We have a ready set of responses when you are unhappy with a non-selection, leave denial, lousy or no award or your appraisal. BUT, management's bad attitude and sensitivity to imagined slights usually requires a specific response.

Here is humorous success story: An employee with a handicapped placard returned from lunch to find a non-handicapped employee in the handicapped spot. The non-handicapped employee said that management told her she could park in the spot. To make a long story short, management said the non-handicapped employee misunderstood and the cars were shuffled. A few weeks later in the employee's mid-year PACS discussion, a comment was included about the employee's not handling disagreements with management decisions well. The employee, who

has a grievance pending on her appraisal, asked what that was about? Management explained it was there because of the parking "incident". The employee kept their cool and replied management said it wasn't there decision; it was the other employee's ***misunderstanding!*** Management REMOVED the comment from the PACS review!

Sometimes, if it gets too bad, you may want to consider an EEO complaint about work assignments. The Local represented an employee who just wanted walk-ins assigned across the board. She was blown off by management several times with a variety of excuses about retirees, trainees, no one else in her unit had complained, etc. She called the Union to file a grievance.

Sadly, management has the right to manage / mismanage / mishandle the fair assignment of work. We filed an EEO complaint to get her assigned to the unit which didn't have to take walk ins. Her immediate response was that she didn't want to learn anything new. Being the noodle that I am, I asked her why she was putting in for promotions if she didn't want to learn anything new. She was gracious and did NOT slap me! We filed. She got moved. She didn't contact me; so, I emailed her to find out if it was going ok. Management, of course, had reneged on some of its promises. However, her coworkers in her old unit were NOT picking up the walk-in slack. So, she got what she had been after for a couple of years because management assigned walk-ins to everyone.

Sometimes, the immediate problem isn't management, it is your co-workers who are never where they are supposed to be and never doing what they are supposed to do. They always have an excuse why they aren't doing / can't do / won't pull their weight. Management lets them get away with it. You could go to management about it. Management likes that because they can blame you. Your co-workers will respond in kind running to management over everything. Management likes it when we are at each other's throats and prove that WE show we can't get along; we aren't team players who will pitch in wherever help is needed.

Think about the people who have been promoted: both the ones who deserve it for their hard work and the newbie / favorites. Did they distinguish themselves by throwing their co-workers under the bus? Were they always in management's cubicle complaining about others who weren't working or working hard enough?

I think the answer is no. Of course, they were always in management's cubicle. But, they were kissing up; singing their own praises about problems they saw and fixed; tough, old cases they cleared; suggestions for training (that they can give); suggestions for work flow changes (that give you more work and less for them).

Like the unfair exclusion of certain employees from walk-ins, above, the direct approach to a difficult problem, more often than not, puts management on the defensive. When excuses for their inaction fail, they then say that YOU are the problem and no one else complained.

Yes! It is very frustrating and very unfair. You should NOT suffer in silence! Call one of the Local Officers and talk to us about the problem and what options we can try!

Ralph de Juliis, President

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