

Southern Unity

American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO
Locals 2014, 2206, 3438, 3509, 3627, 3984, & 4056

AFGE Activists

Return to Capitol Hill



In response to the speed and volume of ongoing attacks on federal workers, activists returned to Capitol Hill early this year for a grueling week-long AFGE Legislative and Grassroots Mobilization Conference..

Participants from many agencies spent the first days of the Conference attending briefings and intensive training that started as early as 7 a.m. and ended as late as 10 p.m. In general sessions, activists

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Notice of Nomination and Election

Nominations and elections for officers of the AFGE Council 220, Atlanta Region, will be conducted at the Regional Caucus, which will be held May 19, 2003, at the Adam's Mark Hotel, 1200 Hampton Street, Columbia, South Carolina. The Caucus will begin at 1:00 p.m. The floor will be open for nominations at 5:30 p.m. and elections will begin at 7:30 p.m. Results will be announced immediately after the balloting is complete. A runoff election, if necessary, will begin at 9:00 p.m. or upon completion and announcement of the results of the first ballot, whichever is later.

Officials to Be Nominated and Elected

- Regional Vice President
- First Regional Representative
- Second Regional Representative
- Third Regional Representative
- Regional Secretary

If you are unable to attend the Caucus, but wish to either nominate or accept a nomination, you may mail your nomination or acceptance to : AFGE Council 220 RIV Election Committee, C/O AFGE Fifth District Office, 6724 Church Street, Suite 2, Riverdale, GA 30274.

Mail nominations/acceptances must be received no later than May 12, 2003. The election will be held in accordance with the provisions of the AFGE National Constitution and the AFGE National Council 220 Constitution.

prepared to address problems affecting employees of all federal agencies: privatization, proposed “reforms” to the civil service system, the loading of federal agencies and courts with decision-makers hostile to workers, and plans to attack our pay and benefits.



Senate Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Susan Collins (R-ME) was the first legislator to address AFGE activists.

At the General Session, AFGE President welcomed guest speaker Senator Susan Collins, Chairman of the Senate’s Governmental Affairs Committee. Senator Collins said she had always backed pay parity with the military and that she wanted AFGE’s input for the Administration’s plan for federal pay reform.

Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) followed next. The previous week, the Senator had persuaded thirty-four of his colleagues to sign his strongly worded letter telling the Director of the Office of Management and Budget about their opposition to privatizing government jobs.

The Government, he said, did not even have a process to determine if privatization resulted in any savings.

He said he resented the Administration’s suggestions that unions were a threat to national security or any agency’s efficiency. More than 5,000 union members had been called to Iraq, he said,

“and no one is asking whether they can do the job!”

He reminded his union audience that President Bush had stopped OSHA (the Occupational Safety and Health Administration) from implementing an ergonomics standard that would have protected workers from repetitive strain injuries. “Despite Academy of Science reports as high as this table! We had a decent program and the Administration turned thumbs down on it!”

Recounting a whole list of governmental assaults on federal employees and their unions the Senator shouted, “They think they can treat workers like some Banana Republic. We’re not, and we’re not going to stand for it!”

Council 220, the Social Security Field Operations Council that represents all SSA field office and TSC employees held a separate meeting to prepare union activists to talk to Members of Congress about issues of special interest to Social Security employees.

Three lobbyists from the firm of Murphy, Frazer and Selfridge, which the Council employs all year, gave a report on what to expect from Washington. The news was not encouraging.

Council leaders discussed the Union’s ongoing efforts to get the Disability Claims Manager job and other higher-grade positions established throughout SSA, management’s insistence that SSA-3368’s be input to the Electronic Disability Collect System—even when the system cannot be accessed by the state agency making disability decisions; management’s increasing attacks on official time; Social Security’s chronic understaffing; etc.

Union representatives got a separate set of issue papers to leave with the legislators they would be visiting.



AFGE Council 220 President Witold Skwierczynski listens to questions at Council 220 Legislative Action Briefing.



AFGE’s lobbyists work for Social Security employees year-round.



Congressman Alcee Hastings (D-FL) seems pleased by the applause from appreciative Union representatives at AFGE’s Legislative Reception.



At Monday evening's Legislative Reception, Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) praised federal workers.



Congressman Artur Davis (D-AL) addressed union activists at the annual Civil Rights Luncheon.



Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) met with AFGE activists and later spoke at the Legislative Reception.

Coordinators had scheduled appointments with the legislators in advance, but they could not decide exactly who would see which legislators until they knew who was attending the Conference. Legislators always pay more attention to people from their home districts, so the coordinators made sure that AFGE representatives got their local Members of Congress among their assigned appointments. Each lawmaker could expect a visit from at least two and sometimes half a dozen AFGE activists. Armed with voting records, maps of Capitol Hill and position papers - cheat sheets the unionists would leave to remind legislators of what the unionists discussed - participants began intensive lobbying on Tuesday, Feb. 12th.

There was no time to look at notes or grope for words. Appointments with Congressional Representatives, Senators, and their staff members last only 15 minutes, are scheduled every half hour, and sometimes involve AFGE representatives from more than one agency. In the 15 minutes between their scheduled visits, AFGE representatives often had to dash a block through the snow to find the appropriate office in one of the vast Congressional building.

Nearly all of the legislators or their senior staff members met with AFGE and received issue papers they could refer to later on.



Senator Edward Kennedy had already proven his support for federal employees.

Legislators must deal with many issues and often have a very dim notion of what is happening in federal agencies. They will not hear anything but the Administration's official line from management - even though individual managers frequently privately disagree with the Administration's position.

That is one reason that it is in the interest of good government for federal unions to engage in legislative action.

Loss of Bargaining Rights Means Changes for the Worse

T. J. Bonner, President of the Border Patrol Council, told activists attending Council 220's legislative action briefing what it was like to work for an agency where collective bargaining was banned. The Border Patrol was swallowed up by the Department of Homeland Security, where collective bargaining has been replaced by "consultation rights." "Thanks for your input," management

tells him when he tries to explain employees' concerns. "We've considered it and think *our* plan is just great."

Bonner told of employees being forced to work unlimited overtime without warning and with no good reason. He gave one example of how stupid policies can be when management makes all the

decisions without considering workers' opinions. Air marshals, the people the Government has placed on airplanes to guard against terrorist takeovers, have been told that they have to wear suits and ties whenever they were on duty, even on a flight from Florida to the Bahamas. The air marshals, who depend on anonymity for effectiveness and safety, have sometimes found themselves the only people on the

plane dressed in what amounts to G-Men outfits.

As a result of the Department of Homeland Security's giving management more so-called "flexibility, some of his agency's employees, Bonner said, were making \$20,000 more per year than others doing the same job.

Union leaders have heard that coming "civil service reform"

legislation could well leave all of us without meaningful union protections. Bonner is convinced that right-wing extremists want to destroy basic collective bargaining rights. "That freight train is on the track and heading towards all federal employees."

AFGE members may want to log on to the "Members Only" section of the AFGE Web site (<http://www.afge.org>) to see an outline of pending legislation.

AFGE Editors Learn from the Pros

Technically speaking, the Editors' Conference, which took place at AFGE Headquarters February 13th, was not part of the Legislative and Grassroots Mobilization Conference, but this year's training will be a valuable aid to unionists trying to influence lawmakers and public opinion.

A twenty-four-year veteran of the House of Representatives, former Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder coached union activists on how to handle elected officials. She told them how to force reluctant politicians to spend time with them, how to make legislators listen with respect, and how to convince them to change their positions on union issues.

Ms. Schroeder's publishing credentials are as good as her old

voting record.: she is now the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Association of American Publishers, the



Former Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder shared insider knowledge at AFGE's Editors' Conference.

national trade organization of the U.S. book publishing industry.

The other three instructors had distinguished careers in mass communications. Stephen Barr has been Congressional Editor and staff writer for the *Washington Post* for the past twenty-four years. Louis LaBrecque has worked as a reporter for the Bureau of National Affairs for the past eight years. Kathleen Murphy writes for Stateline.org, a Web site funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts to inform people about innovative public policies on the state level.

These three distinguished instructors took turns teaching their AFGE students how to work effectively with professional news reporters.

Administrative Leave for Hardship Reassignments

Administrative leave is granted for employee hardship reassignments under the 1992 AFGE/SSA Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) covering this subject.

Normally, one day of administrative leave is provided for each 300 — 350 miles of travel time. If you are traveling less than this number of miles, you can still receive a part of a day, or at least a few hours.

Also, a day for packing, and

a day for unpacking is granted. This can be less time or more time, depending upon the amount of goods to be moved.

Other moving chores, such as arranging for the connection of utilities, getting children settled into new schools, and other items of other personal business, are candidates for administrative time, also.

The Atlanta Region is very receptive to approving this time, per the MOU. At times, we do

encounter managers that are not familiar with the agreement's requirements, since they may not work with it often. When this happens, AFGE works with the state directors to get any misunderstanding resolved.

Other regions are not as cooperative, and at times, do not readily adhere to the agreement. An employee who is being reassigned to a region other than Atlanta may feel the adverse impact.

Within seven days of the AFGE/management concurrence on approval of a hardship reassignment in this region, AFGE representative Mary Beth Haney sends the employee an e-mail message explaining the administrative leave procedures. By this time, management is supposed to have already discussed the

reassignment, explaining what leave is available under the MOU.

Mary Beth can be reached via SSA's e-mail or by telephone, at 606-886-8525, ext. 207.

If you have had a hardship reassignment since the 1992 MOU has been in effect, and did not receive administrative time, please contact Mary Beth, if you

move. This administrative leave is there for you, courtesy of AFGE – working for you and your family.



Two Cents Worth The Atlanta Region Treasurers' Report

Reminder: If you change your name or address, please notify your Local Treasurer. If you do not, you may not receive your mail from AFGE.

The progressive Treasurers of the Atlanta Region are forging ahead, using the resources furnished by the National Secretary-Treasurer's Office. Treasurers' new ability to input information online eliminates the time and expense of "snail mail."

In addition, we can now input transactions to keep the Locals' financial business up to

Date, and can check our own Local's records from the National Secretary-Treasurer's office for at least a year.

On our monthly conference call, the treasurers discuss new procedures and help each other learn the new technology. We can ensure that each local is processing information in the same manner.

Networking this way helps

not only the individual treasurer but each Local as well.

On the conference call in March, National Secretary-Treasurer Jim Davis, shared his future plans for enhancement of the new program and his expertise regarding the important role of the Local Treasurer. He has agreed to participate in additional calls when his schedule allows.

Can We Believe What Politicians Tell Us?

Former Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder gave us this illustration:

Two anti-labor lobbyists were sitting in the waiting area of a Congressman's office, organizing their papers before they went to speak to another legislator. The Congressman emerged from his inner office, shaking hands with a union person who thanked him heartily for his promise to support pro-labor legislation. As soon as the union man was out of the room, one of the two anti-labor lobbyists protested, "Congressman, you told us that you were against unions and for the "Right to Work." The Congressman replied, "If you guys want me to back you, you'll have to learn to come in *one at a time.*"

Privatizing No Bargain in Mississippi OHA

By Sheri Jose

In the Mississippi Offices of Hearings and Appeals, employees of Tommie Nobis Enterprises now hold the job of case puller.

A puller simply marks the exhibits for a case and prepares an exhibit list. Social Security provides a computer program that the contract employee can download to his/her computer. It is then quite simple to select the appropriate description and insert a date. The contract employees provide nothing more – no summary, no procedural history, no nothing.

A pilot OHA office in Region V reported that contract pulling was a wonderful success! However, employees in that office had to correct files done by the contract pullers. Unfortunately, these loyal OHA employees did not complain to management about case deficiencies, so management's glowing praise was not questioned by the Powers that Be. Now a Memorandum of Understanding assigns the task

of correcting the contract employees' work to management.

The local OHA has no control over who pulls the cases – Tommie Nobis Enterprises hires these people. Most of them seem to be former Social Security employees, but nothing precludes the hiring of people who have left under questionable circumstances.

How about the employee who was immediately discharged after it was discovered she was selling information to claimants? Does she have access to these files? We don't know.

Think about the information in these files – Social Security numbers of family members, addresses, personal information, income and resources, etc. Should this information be circulated to people who are not subject to background scrutiny and who do not work in a controlled environment?

Tommie Nobis Enterprises receives \$44.99 for each case, pulled by one of its contract

employees in the Tupelo, Mississippi, Office of Hearings and Appeals. The employee receives \$36.98 per case. For Jackson, Mississippi's OHA cases, Tommie Nobis Enterprises receives \$45.56 and their employee receives \$37.49.

One contract puller stated that it took her less than one hour to pull a case and do an exhibit list. The employee is earning more than \$35 an hour.

The contractor's employees prepare only the simpler hearings cases. They get only straight disability cases – no files involving cessations, remands, children's claims, widows' claims, or redeterminations.

The more difficult cases are left for the bargaining unit employees – the ones who do the summaries and who know the intricacies of case pulling. What are they paid? A Grade 8, Step 10 makes only \$25.34 an hour.

News from the Locals

Local 2014

A large number of equal employment opportunity cases, both formal and informal, have kept Local 2014 busy lately.

In late December we took to arbitration a case including

nine grievances on the handling of the awards for the Little Havana field office. We submitted a brief to the arbitrator at the end of February. We are now awaiting the decision.

Four employees in the Fort

Lauderdale and Tampa Teleservice Centers finally got their hardship transfers, as a result of the Regional Union-Management grievance. Local 2014 was actively involved in getting a satisfactory settlement.

Local 2206

Local President Anthony Young is very proud of the contributions of all the women of Local 2206. This is what he had to say: "Your Union has some of the most intelligent,

hard-working, dedicated and strong women in the Social Security Administration. When I am asked to give a definition of a Superwoman, my reply is, "A Local 2206 woman." They are

infectious. That is, all of the good about them rubs off on everyone in their presence.

"I want to thank all the women in the SEPSC, BMTSC, OGC, ROQA, and the Atlanta

Regional Office for helping the Social Security Administration meet and exceed its goals every day.

Join AFGE and get inspir4ed by some Superwomen. "The women from Local 2206 have been very instrumental in lobbying Congress and

negotiating everything from the National contract to local agreements. They represent employees at all levels.

Local 3627

Against a backdrop of Smoky Mountain orange, yellow, and red, Local 3627 held its annual meeting in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, November 14 and 15, 2002. The peaceful setting was dimmed only by the serious tone of the event.

President Sue Burton opened the meeting and introduced new officers. Approximately 45 members attended and listened to presentations in several areas. Treasurer Marilyn Ellison discussed treasury responsibilities and pointed out the availability of new materials on the AFGE Web site. Chief Steward Mary Peck led a discussion on managing official time and chain of command. She also provided guidelines on grievances. Cam Otter, senior attorney from Macon, GA, gave a presentation on assessment panel procedures. Rhonda

Bolding, Executive Vice President, discussed Article 30 and pointed out that Sue Burton first must be notified of any change in work conditions. Carl Warren, Alabama State Vice President, discussed arbitration and Articles 24 and 25.

Jim Marshall, President of AFGE Council #215 and AFGE General Committee Spokesman, spoke Thursday afternoon and Friday. He was not optimistic regarding any progress for employees under the current administration. He pointed out that numerous grievances and ULPs have been filed and there has been little success thus far. He provided a number of handouts to deal with various problems.

Despite this somewhat dour tone, members were inspired by the various speakers.

The President informed

members that there would be a recruitment bonus of \$25 for each new member who joined by December 13. Recruitment packages were to be immediately forwarded to stewards, and each was encouraged to do his/her best to recruit more dues-paying members. In this climate, it is imperative we do so in order to present a united front to those working so diligently to strip us of influence and power. Our only ammunition is in our numbers and in the voting booth.

Our meeting ended about 3:00 Friday afternoon.

There were a number of new faces. "First timers" were rewarded for their time and effort in attending. Members enjoyed some fine food and entertainment in the Gatlinburg area, and all left with a resolve to fight the administration's attempt to break our united resolve.

Local 3984

Local 3984 does a weekly newsletter entitled "Contract Comments" that is sent to our reps and alternate reps. Reda Stucker, one of our state officers, picks a different subject pertaining to the SSA/AFGE contract, researches it and then writes it up.

Our reps have found this

reference tool very useful. They can keep it both electronically and in paper form. The newsletter provides references to the articles in the contract and to other relevant sources and Web sites.

In addition to this weekly distribution, Reda composes what Local 3984 calls "Contract

101" for the local annual training. She researches the contract and develops questions to be answered by the reps. New reps become familiar with the contract and seasoned reps get refresher training. Contract 101 also serves as a reference tool to be used again and again.

Local 4056

Local 4056 continues to press forward with litigation. Cases scheduled or soon to be scheduled for arbitration involve a number of issues: SSA's failure to promote an employee to the TE position, an MSS's acting as an

OS, illegal hiring practices and promotions, failure to allow the Union to audit promotion packages and the improper charging of employees with violations of the Standards of Conduct.

In our most recent

arbitration case, Phil Devlin helped an employee get a promotion from teleservice representative to claims representative - with back pay and interest.

The Local continues to pursue issues like eDIB.

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2001 Siesta Dr., Suite 301
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Published quarterly by Locals 2014, 2206, 3438, 3509, 3627, 3984 & 4056
of the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO

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My friends, it is solidarity of labor we want. We do not want to find fault with each other, but to solidify our forces and say to each other: "We must be together; our masters are joined together and we must do the same thing."

**– Mother Jones, 1902
Speaking before the convention
of the UMWA, Indianapolis, IN**