

Southern Unity

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SSA post-Katrina: narrow interpretations, limited help for employees... **Union actions pay off!**

Could your office operate out of a double wide trailer? Is brown tap water at work acceptable? Would you want SSA to take full advantage of OPM disaster regulations to help you? They didn't, until...

Our Field Council, joined by other union councils, filed a national grievance on SSA's handling of hurricanes-related issues. Then Dana Duggins, Third Vice President of our AFGE Council, and Larry Anderson, Local 3438 President, visited the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Then Larry and Dana met with elected officials and/or their staff in Mississippi. Dana then went to Washington D.C., and she and Witold Skwierczynski, our Council President, visited Members of Congress in their Washington offices.



Moss Point temporary office: a double-wide

[***Pinky is inside... p. 3***](#)

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Notice of Nomination and Election

Nomination and election for officers of the AFGE Council 220, Atlanta Region, will be conducted at the Regional Caucus, held May 7th, 2006, at the Wynfrey Galleria Hotel, 1000 Riverchase Galleria, Birmingham AL 35244, phone 205 987-1600. The Caucus will begin at 10:00 a.m. on the 7th. The floor will be open for nominations at 4:00 p.m. on the 7th and elections will begin at 5:30 p.m. Results will be announced immediately after the balloting is complete. A runoff election, if necessary, will begin at 7:30 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 R4 Election Committee, C/O AFGE Fifth District Office, 6724 Church Street, Suite 2, Riverdale, GA 30274-4711. Mail nominations/acceptances must be received no later than May 1st, 2006. The election will be held in accordance with the provisions of the AFGE National Constitution and the AFGE National Council 220 Constitution.

AFGE reps visit SSA offices in Katrina's path

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First stop was in Moss Point, Mississippi where Mary Ann Joe is the AFGE Representative. They then went to Gulfport, Mississippi where Renee Linton-Johnson is the Representative and on to Biloxi, Mississippi where Karla Alexander is the Representative.

At each office they met with the staff. The meetings were conducted around the lunch breaks and AFGE provided sandwiches and drinks for the employees. Most of the employees felt that the local managers were in the same situation that they were in and under the circumstances were doing the best that they could.

Dana was able to give much information that the employees were unaware of, such as OPM authorizing per diem for employees whose homes were damaged to the extent that they were deemed unlivable. Some

Some employees were living in hotel rooms while their homes are being repaired or new homes built. They were not receiving per diem even though OPM disaster regulations give the authority to do so. Some employees were living in their damaged homes ... It is a shame that SSA chose not to immediately take advantage of the disaster regulations to assist these employees...

[See story continuation on page 4. Following our lobbying efforts, SSA has belatedly adopted OPM's regulations with a Senior Staff memo issued on 2/16/06.]

employees are living in rental homes or apartments while their homes are being repaired or in some cases new homes built. They are not receiving per diem even though OPM guidance gives the authority to do so. Some employees are living in their damaged homes while the work is being done without any help from the Agency in the way of per diem, again when it was authorized by OPM.

It was also discovered that employees who were assigned to other offices while their offices were closed had mileage compensation reduced by the distance they usually traveled to their old office. This provision should not apply if the old office is not available for the employees to go to. In AFGE's opinion this is a misinterpretation of the travel regulations and unfairly penalizes the employee.

There are many instances where employees appear to have been disadvantaged by the Agency's failure to take advantage of OPM's authorization to assist employees affected by Hurricane Katrina. OPM recognized the unique problems brought on by Hurricane Katrina and made provision for the unprecedented damage done by the storm. They gave federal agencies means to deal with these unique problems to provide help for their employees dealing with disaster in their work and home life. It is a shame that SSA chose not to immediately take advantage of these provisions to assist our employees who are always there to serve the public.

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Left to right, AFGE Moss Point Representative Mary Ann Joe, Local 3438 President Larry Anderson, and Council 220 Third VP Dana Duggins

Pinky says, “You can talk the talk...”

No irreverent Pinky in this column. Sometimes Pinky becomes aware of situations that are so outrageous that irreverence is replaced by a terrible anger. This story is true. It is a commentary about the employer we work for and the leadership of JoAnn Barnhart and Paul Barnes. It is not a pretty story. But let me digress with a little background information.

In 1992, AFGE negotiated a reassignment memorandum of understanding (MOU). Included in that MOU was a process that allowed for the hardship transfers of employees. Both AFGE and the agency recognized that there would be circumstances that would require relocating an employee outside of the normal relocation process.

You would think that any employer would go out of their way to accommodate an employee dealing with a serious illness of a family member. But not at SSA!!

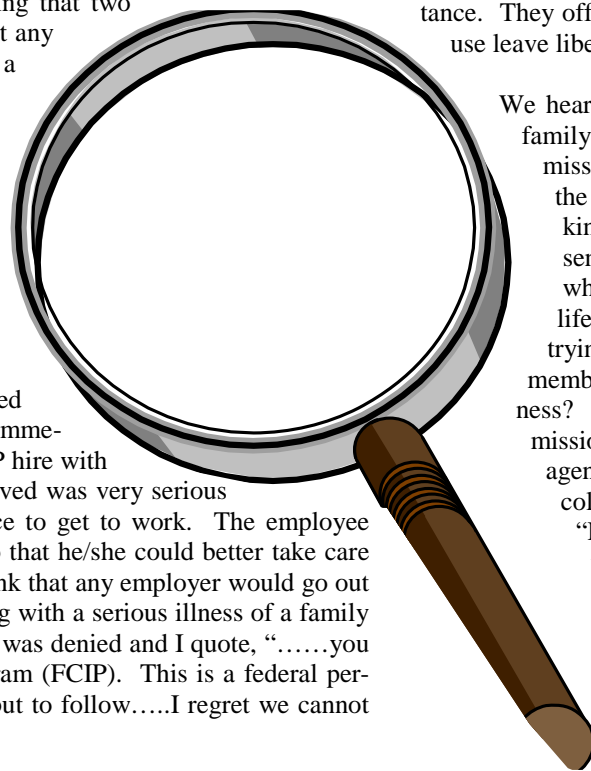
Hardships take many forms; military transfer of a spouse, new job for a spouse, marriage, divorce, etc. Some of the most poignant are family illnesses and certainly these situations are extremely trying for the employee involved.

Almost all new employees in the Atlanta Region are hired using the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Federal Career Intern Program (FCIP) hiring authority. Management has become enamored of this process for two reasons. First it provides for a two year probationary period. During that two year period an employee may be let go for almost any reason. Second, FCIP hires are forced to sign a statement agreeing not to relocate for any reason during the two year probationary period. On the latter item, management claims that the OPM authority for FCIP hires forbids relocation. That claim is blatantly untrue. The bar on FCIP relocation is an SSA policy and is coldly calculated to help “control” newly hired employees.

Enough background. Now to our sordid tale. Recently an employee in the Atlanta Region asked for a hardship transfer based on the illness of an immediate family member. The employee was an FCIP hire with less than two years on the job. The illness involved was very serious and the employee was commuting a fair distance to get to work. The employee asked to go to an office nearer their residence so that he/she could better take care of the immediate family member. You would think that any employer would go out of their way to accommodate an employee dealing with a serious illness of a family member. But not at SSA!! The hardship request was denied and I quote, “.....you were hired using the Federal Career Intern Program (FCIP). This is a federal personnel policy guideline that we have no choice but to follow.....I regret we cannot accommodate your reassignment request.....”



Management did make an offer of assistance. They offered to let the employee use leave liberally. Of course!



We hear much these days about family values and how Commissioner Barnhart values the SSA workforce. What kinds of values are represented by an employer who is unwilling to make life easier for an employee trying to help a family member with a terrible illness? And what kind of Commissioner would allow the agency she leads to be so cold and uncaring?

“Hey JoAnn. So you value SSA employees? Pinky has a hot tip for you. Actions speak louder than words.”

—Pinky

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*For information
on AFGE Council
220's Officers
and Locals, visit
afgec220atl.org*



Moss Point site — [Related story starts on page 1...](#)

AFGE reps found the administration could do more for its own employees ...and did something about it!

[\(Continued from page 2\)](#)

There also appears to be some question as to the safety of the area even now. The local management could not confirm that adequate tests had been done on the soil around the buildings. They also said that the city had tested the water but could not confirm that GSA had done any test. In one office employees were drinking bottled water. The water on tap was discolored.

In Mississippi and Washington, union representatives carried on an intense lobbying campaign on behalf of the affected SSA workers, including visits with the home staff of Congressman Gene Taylor, (D-MS) and Senators Trent Lott (R-MS) and Thad Cochran (R-MS). Upon her return to the Capitol, Dana and Witold (who had made a similar visit to Louisiana) met with these members of Congress, as well as with Senator Mary Landrieu (D-LA) and Congressman William J. Jefferson (D-LA) in their Washington offices. The effort appears to be paying off, as SSA has announced a change of position, and now say they will follow the OPM guidance to provide financial support to employees who are victims of the Hurricanes. Let your Local President know if you were displaced from your home or office, by the hurricanes.



Casino in Biloxi — [Story starts on page 1...](#)