Since its release in July of 2014, the NAPA report—the strategic plan developed by The National Academy of Public Administration for SSA—has remained a point of contention between the Agency and the Union.

Management has historically embraced the plan, while the Union believes it to be incredibly problematic.

The plan calls for the dramatic reduction in staff, increased automation with the elimination of human judgment, e-services as the primary mode of service delivery, and dramatic outsourcing of government work to private industry.

Acting SSA Commissioner Carolyn W. Colvin, however, recently commented that the NAPA report was not her Vision for the Agency. On April 27, 2015 she released her own, fully developed vision document entitled Vision 2025.

Agency officials stress that Vision 2025 document and the NAPA report are different, with Vision 2025 providing a picture of SSA’s 10-year destination, while the NAPA report is the roadmap on how the Agency will get there.

A side-by-side comparison of the two, however, reveals few differences. Colvin’s Vision 2025 calls for similar (and immediate) action, all of which will disadvantage both SSA employees and the Union.

You are hereby notified in compliance with the AFGE Council 220 constitution, that the 2015 National Convention will be held—

Fri., August 14 - Sat., August 15 @
Walt Disney World, Swan and Dolphin,
1500 Epcot Resorts Blvd,
Lake Buena Vista, FL

Nominations and elections for all AFGE Council 220 Executive Office positions will be held at the convention. These include: President, Executive Vice President, 1st Vice President, 2nd Vice President, 3rd Vice President, 4th Vice President of TSC, Secretary & Treasurer. The term of office is 3 years ending with the installation of officers following the regularly scheduled elections in 2018. The President and Executive VP are delegates by virtue of office to the 2018 AFGE convention.

Nominations will be accepted from the floor. A second nomination is not required. Self nominations are permissible. Candidates must accept nomination at the meeting or, if not in attendance, submit a written acceptance to the Elections Committee Chair before the close of nominations. Placement on the ballot will be determined following nominations.

A runoff election will be held, if necessary, following the counting of ballots at a time and place determined by the Elections Committee. All protests to the election must be in writing and received by the Elections Committee prior to, during, or within ten days after the election. This election is governed by the AFGE Rules of Conduct for an Election, set forth in Appendix A of the AFGE National Constitution.

Voting and delegate representation will be in accordance with Article IV and Article XII of the AFGE Council 220 Council Constitution.

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Feds Face Budget Battle

By Shawn Halloran, Staff Writer
Generalist CR, Syracuse NY

After several years of budget cuts, office closings, and shrinking staff, many Social Security employees believed the agency had begun to turn the corner when the this year’s budget, fiscal year 2015, was announced. With increased funding from Congress, SSA was able to hire employees in meaningful numbers for the first time in recent memory and office hours expanded to meet public demand.

However, SSA employees once again have cause for concern.
Editor’s Note

I’ve heard that the best things in life are the things we least expect, and that was the case for me when I heard I was selected as the new Editor of AFGE Council 220’s print publication, UNITY.

I have 11 years of Federal Service, the last decade of which I have spent as a Generalist CR in a somewhat rural Field Office in northern, Indiana. I live in my home-town, and the claimants I serve are members of the community I call home.

I am, for lack of a better way of putting it, a small town girl with big-town dreams, and becoming Editor of a publication that has a 17k+ (and growing) print circulation was certainly a dream come true.

My promise to you, my fellow SSA colleagues, is that the Publications Committee and I will work diligently to investigate, research, write and print articles worth reading — articles that inform you about current issues affecting you and your work — articles that engage you in AFGE initiatives—and perhaps most importantly—articles that inspire you to press on.

In Solidarity,

Cari Watson, Editor

“Be sincere; be brief; be seated.” - FDR

Editor Cari Watson and daughter Katie. Cari is an honors graduate of Ball State University and has a bachelors in English Rhetoric & Composition.

UNITY is the bi-monthly print publication of Council 220, organized under the American Federation of Government Employees (AFL-CIO):

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Please direct all name and address corrections to your Local Treasurer. If you are a Field Office AFGE member and do not receive UNITY, ask your Treasurer to make certain that the Council block shows “220” for your entry on the AFGE National membership roster.

EDITORIAL:

mySocialSecurity: The Public Deserves All the Facts

By Ana Rivers, Staff Writer
Generalist CR, Spokane, WA

SSA is aggressively promoting its online services, but is neglecting to educate the public about the dangers of potential identity theft, fraud and theft or misuse of benefits that go with it.

For example, SSA has failed to sufficiently notify the public about the alarming findings published by independent auditing firm Grand Thornton LLP. Their November 2014 audit, which was commissioned by SSA’s Office of Inspector General, and required by law, stated, “[SSA’s cyber] security deficiencies, when aggregated, ... significantly comprom...mised the security of its information...” They added, “These weaknesses could impact the confidentiality, integrity and availability of SSA information systems and data.”

Likewise, SSA has kept silent about the 34 year old man in Miami, FL who, in July 2014, plead guilty to aggravated ID theft and online fraud of Social Security benefits. From January 2013—May 2014 he created numerous fake myssa.gov accounts with stolen, real personal information from current SSA beneficiaries. He then re-directed benefits and received over $700,000!

Despite these facts, SSA continues to aggressively promote its website and fails to mention the risk involved to the public. Is this good customer service? Is this even ethical? In its push to automate, SSA is not only willing to jeopardize the security of the data it is charged with safeguarding, but is willing to purposefully mislead the public into a false sense of security by omitting the truth about online fraud and theft. I am not okay with that.
2025, from page 1

the American public.

Colvin stated her plan emphasizes employee empowerment, technological advancement, and customers driven service delivery. Vision 2025, however, fails to address how customers who want to visit an office can visit an office, as the Agency continues to force customers into self-service.

Ruby Burrell, the Agency’s Chief Strategic Officer for Vision 2025, assured the Union that there is a moratorium on office closures. Vision 2025, however, reveals no plan to reopen the 800 field offices and 500 contact stations lost nationwide since 2010. It also neglects to address the replacement of 11,000 employees lost through attrition, promotion, or resignation in the last 4 years. SSA’s own Agency Strategic Plan for 2014-2018 states “we estimate that more than 21,000 of our employees will retire by FY 2022. A shrinking workforce affects our ability to meet the needs and expectations of our customers and stakeholders.” Yet, Colvin’s Vision 2025 makes no provision to address this issue.

Backed by statistics from agency polls, Vision 2025 claims that 51% of the public prefers to use the internet when conducting business with SSA. What the document fails to disclose is that the sample group the Agency polled for this study consisted of existing customers already using the internet to access SSA services, NOT the general public. A poll conducted by advocacy group, Social Security Works, shows that in reality only 13% of registered voters prefer to access SSA services online, with 87% of registered voters preferring phone or face-to-face services.

Vision 2025 also calls for the wide sharing of Personal Identifiable Information, or PII, across agencies and private industry but lacks a plan for obtaining the public’s authorization to share that information. Essentially, every citizen’s PII will be for sale to the highest bidder when government work is contracted out to private industry — something the Agency is already doing with companies like Experian, Comerica, Equifax, and Accuity.

TeleService Center (TSC) Vice President of AFGE Council 220, Jeremy Maske was recently appointed Chairperson of AFGE’s Grassroots National Action Team (or GNAT team). GNAT seeks to stop Vision 2025’s implementation. Maske’s appointment in March 2015 came after the retirement of former Chair David Sheagely, who now works as an AFGE Legislative and Political Organizer.

Maske plans a continued, proactive approach against the Agency’s implementation of Vision 2025. “We will be working with the coalition,” he said, “which includes many groups like the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), American Federation of Labor - Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), Alliance for Retired Americans (ARA), and others to expand Social Security and to provide the constituency with the phone and face-to-face service they want.”

SSA’s future looks poor with Colvin’s Vision. AFGE, however, is diligently working to ensure the Agency provides quality service to the American people it serves.

— The —
(Un) Fairness of PACS

Study shows systematic bias against minorities, disabled and lower-grade employees

By Monique Buchanan, Staff Writer
Executive Vice-President Local 3239
TE, Livonia, MI

On February 25, 2014, the Agency provided Witold Skwierzynski, then-General Committee spokesperson and current Council 220 President, with Performance Assessment and Communication System (PACS) Appraisal data pursuant to Article 21, Section 10 of the contract. Initial analysis of this data showed that minority and disabled employees received disproportionately lower shares of Level 5 ratings than their peers.

In light of these findings, Richard Couture, AFGE’s General Committee’s Litigation Committee Chair, filed a Union-Management Grievance (UMG) against SSA’s use and application of FY 2013 PACS and requested all related and relevant data at component and regional levels. The UMG, which was filed April 1, 2014, cited systematic discrimination against, and unfair treatment of, minority and disabled employees.

On April 14, 2014, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission issued a damning report criticizing the Agency’s handling of its EEO policies and complaints procedure. On June 6, 2014, the Agency provided the Union with additional data sought via the data request.

On July 31, 2014 the grievance was then amended to add the unfair and inequitable treatment of employees at and below the GS 11 pay level, based on the component to which

See PACS, page 4
From PACS, page 3

they are assigned and showing dis- parate impact against employees based on gender in certain regions.

The Union’s argument to prove this unfair and inequitable treatment of employees was based upon statistical evidence at all levels, the numerous grievances and EEO complaints filed by employees over appraisals, awards, merit promotion nation-wide, and based on their component. The April 14, 2014 EEOC report was also cited.

In August 2014, Union and Agency representatives met at Headquarters in Baltimore, MD in an attempt to resolve the grievance, but were unsuccessful. The parties engaged in continuing settlement discussions until December 2014, when both parties agreed to schedule a grievance meeting via telephone in January 2015. Settlement discussions have yet to be successful.

The FY 2013 reported data shows that although minority classes make up 54.28% of the BU, the percentage of the minority employees receiving Level 5 ratings was 37.55%. Meanwhile white employees, who make up 45.68% of the BU, received a disproportionately high 62.45% of Level 5 ratings for the same FY. As stated in the UMG, “...the percentage of each class’ overall share of Level 5 ratings should reasonably approximate the percentage of each class’ population in the overall bargaining unit.” The data shows this was clearly not the case. Minorities, for example, received Level 5 ratings at a rate less than four-fifths of their white colleagues in FY 2013 at the national and at the regional/HQ/OCO level.

In addition, the data clearly showed that employees at GS-11 grade level and below received a disproportionate lower number of Level 5’s in their PACS reviews. This class of employees make up approximately 80% of the BU, yet they received only 20% of the PACS 5’s awarded for FY 2013. This indicates a substantial bias by Management toward lower grade employees.

Disabled employees were especially negatively affected as well, as they received only 6% of Level 5’s awarded, although they make up 10% of the BU. They also received the most (and disproportionately high) number of Level 1 ratings, which indicates significant bias toward this class of employees by Management as well.

These element average trends at the national level were mirrored at the component, regional, HQ and OCO level. Not only did these employees receive far fewer Level 5 ratings, but fewer also 4.0 and 4.5 averages as well. As stated in the UMG, “this shows that minority employees not only suffered from discrimination and unfair treatment in their ratings of record (Level 3 versus Level 5), but also in the ROC-award-eligible element averages.” This disadvantaged minority employees by dis-qualifying them for cash awards and points for the promotional Best Qualified List. The same was true of disabled and lower-grade employees.

Startlingly, the FY 2014 appraisal data showed the numbers worsened.

On February 11, 2015 Richard Couture filed an additional UMG for SSA’s use of the faulty appraisal system in FY 2014. In this grievance, he said the following: “The Union is gravely concerned about the disparate impact, disparate treatment, and unfair and inequitable treatments the PACs system has against AFGE bargaining unit employees.”

Despite the negative EEOC report and the Union’s filing of various UMG’s regarding the clear bias inherent to the current PACS, SSA continues to use the existing PACS as their sole means of employee assessment. The Union has argued that this is further evidence of systematic bias and inequity.

In an interview held with Richard Couture, he stated, “PACS is broken and it doesn’t work.” Indeed, the facts show this to be true. The Union continues to seek settlement.
Executive Order 13518 states: “The Federal Government will thereby help lead by example in promoting veterans’ employment,” as such, the Agency is tasked with hiring and retaining quality veteran employees.

While the Agency has made an effort to hire veterans through the Feds Hire Vets (more information about that program can be found at www.fedshirevets.gov) initiative, assisting and retaining them has become an issue.

A disturbing trend shows that many newly hired veterans are terminated within 8 months of hire, as the Agency is ill-equipped to support them and meet their unique needs during their transition into civil service.

Under Executive Order from President Obama, AFGE and SSA meet in monthly Forums on the national level to permit federal sector Unions to engage in pre-decision involvement with Agency Management on issues that will improve public service and employee work conditions. During these meetings, it was recognized that the issue of hiring and retaining veterans within the Agency must be addressed.

As such, a collaborative AFGE/SSA Veteran’s Workgroup was created. The Workgroup is set to first meet in June 2015 in Baltimore.

The Workgroup consists of six people — three AFGE representatives who are SSA employees with military service, and three Agency representatives.

The three Union representatives are: Marine Corp veteran Amad Ali, a CR in New Albany, IN who is also Executive Vice President of Local 3571; Army Veteran John Walton, a Social Insurance Specialist in WBDOC in Wilkes Barre PA, who also serves as President of Local 2809; and Air Force Veteran Annett Brooks-Norman of WNPSC in Region IX, who also serves as Executive Vice President of Local 1122.

The Workgroup is a positive product of the AFGE-SSA Forums that will lead to the implementation of better internal work conditions, clarity and assistance for Veterans employed by SSA.

Issues to be discussed:

- Service connected disabilities in the workplace, including training Management on PTSD and other similar conditions
- Providing consistent information nationally to newly hired vets
- Difficulties highly decorated and educated veterans encounter when hiring in at the GS-5 level with limited promotional ability
- Reserve Active Duty time and its effect on employment
- Hiring in with the correct Service Comp Dates
- Vets being credited with appropriate Leave Categories
- Keeping veterans informed about programs available to them within and outside of the Agency
- Advising veterans on military leave and general leave issues
- Identifying veterans and enhancing communication to and among veterans
- Survey of Agency veterans on different issues
- Creation of a Veteran’s Support Group

“Veterans do not want a ‘handout’ — just an understanding and direction on where to go when we need assistance and help.” —John Walton, Charter Member AFGE/SSA Veterans Workgroup

Know Your Rights

The 2012 SSA/AFGE National Agreement is available on SSA’s Intranet under Labor & Employee Relations website. It is also available at www.AFGEc220.org. Know your rights as a bargaining unit employee. If you have questions about the contract, contact your local Union Representative.

You have the right to:

- Flex Lunch
- Denial of Leave in Writing
- Reasonable Accommodations
- Union Representation
- Engage in Union activity free of reprisal
- Wear what you wish
- Meet with your Local Rep while at work
- Challenge PACS
- 3 days of Sick Leave before providing a doctor’s note
- Review documentation in the event of disciplinary
Republican budgets presented in both the House of Representatives and the Senate are bad news for federal workers and Social Security employees in particular.

AFGE estimates that the federal workforce has contributed $159 billion towards reducing the deficit thus far. Yet the Republican budget introduced by Senator Mike Enzi would impose further employee sacrifice, raising worker pension contributions to 6.35 percent across the board. This adds up to an additional $170 billion given back by feds.

The budget cuts are directed at Social Security spending, too. Though Congress has not provided specifics as to what cuts the agency may encounter, it is clear that money once earmarked for SSA may not be there in the future. In his analysis of the Republican proposal, Senator Bernie Sanders, ranking member of the Senate Budget Committee, talks about decreased spending. SSA’s budget comes from “non-defense discretionary spending”, which accounts for 55% of the spending cuts called for in the budget.

**AFGE estimates that the federal workforce has contributed $159 billion towards reducing the deficit thus far.**

The President’s budget request for 2016 calls for a modest increase in funding, a significant part of which is earmarked for medical continuing disability reviews. It seems the agency will face an uphill battle in building upon the gains made just one year ago.

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**From Budget Battle, page 1**

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**ERGONOMICS: ...Is Within Reach**

**By Suzanne Moseman, Staff Writer**
**T2 CR, Minneapolis, MN**

Permanent Workstations at Barrier Wall (PWBW) is a hot topic right now. If your office has standard SSA installed workstations, you sit at a desktop that can be raised or lowered to accommodate height preferences and keyboard placement. But there’s a catch. You may be straining across the 27” FEI desk to reach a document or ID card that a visitor needs to pass to you across the 24” visitor desk, a total of 51” - over 4 feet!

If you have the workstation desktop at a level that doesn’t match the visitor desk height, you may face problems more inconvenient than an occasional ID card dropping through the space between the desks.

In bargaining with the Alexandria, MN, field office management about floor plans, the Union presented findings that indicate the PWBW desks (1) “do not accomplish their intended goal and employees are not trained to use them properly,” (2) are “too deep to use as a transaction desk, causing muscle strain from stretching to reach the transaction window” and (3) the desks result in “misalignment with window sill or customer desk, causing strain from lifting and reaching over different surface levels.

These conclusions are from The Bell Report commissioned by SSA and produced by three architectural companies.

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A short person working at such a desk is likely to lean forward much of the time, causing a stress on the back muscles as well as the shoulder.

In addition to the risk of muscle strain, these desks present a personal safety hazard. In trying to reach across that acreage to hand the visitor a form, some representatives stand up part or all of the way, and are vulnerable to being grabbed and pulled into the public area.

Finally, when using a computer keyboard, workers are at risk of repetitive strain injuries unless the wrists are in a straight position – too low for a practical desktop. Office furniture that includes an adjustable keyboard shelf in a cutout in the desk surface is easiest on the wrists.

What can you do? Stop stretching! It’s not healthy and it’s not safe. Instead, you might use a very lightweight tray or a lid from a box of copier paper for cards and documents. It will save your shoulder from strain and prevent papers from dropping through the space between the desks onto the floor.

Be sure to select a tray light enough that it can’t be used as a weapon against you and stay seated when passing documents to visitors.

AFGE filed a National Grievance over the ergonomic issues related to the installation of barrier walls. AFGE and SSA are currently engaging in settlement discussions over the grievance.
AFGE Wins Big Against Agency

2000+ Grievances Involved in IVOL Settlement

By Ryan Gurganious, Staff Writer
Generalist CR, Lincolnton, NC
AFGE Council 220 Representative/Council 220 Publications Committee Chair

The Agency unilaterally developed and implemented the Internal Vacancy On-line (IVOL) system in November of 2007 to centralize all internal merit promotion announcements. This was done without negotiating with the Union. Consequently, the Union filed a National Grievance.

The National Grievance went to Arbitration. The Union won Arbitration to settle these disputes collectively in March 2012, and settlement terms were reached.

The Arbitrator agreed with the Union that the Agency unilaterally implemented this new electronic application process.

The Arbitrator’s decision provided for employees to file individual grievances if they felt they were unfairly and improperly excluded from consideration for a promotion due to SSA’s use of IVOL. Over 1,800 employees filed over 2,000 grievances, as they believed IVOL disadvantaged them during the application process.

AFGE is currently determining which grievances meet the settlement criteria to determine the final number of settled cases.

According to IVOL’s home intranet page, “IVOL provides a more efficient (and now mandatory) online application process.” IVOL, however, changed how applications are initially assessed. IVOL does not take into consideration the employee’s experience, training, performance or awards. It relied solely on the answers to a simple questionnaire to establish the best-qualified (BQ) list.

Merit Promotions are filled by applicants on the BQ list.

As such, the system severely disadvantaged certain users who may not have made the BQ list when they normally would or should have.

IVOL remains in use by the Agency. SSA management did not immediately respond to our requests for comment.

Information regarding the settlement will be posted to the council website, www.AFGEc220.org, as it becomes available.

Grievances eligible for settlement under the terms of the arbitration must meet certain criteria:

- The grievance must have been filed by May 14, 2012,
- The grievant must have applied for an AFGE bargaining unit vacancy during the period of November 13, 2007 through March 30, 2012,
- the grievant must be a current SSA employee in a SSA Bargaining unit position as of September 30, 2014 (a grievant detailed to a position outside of the bargaining unit will remain eligible if their position of record remains an AFGE Bargaining Unit position),
- any otherwise eligible grievant who was involuntarily removed from SSA as of September 30, 2014, but that becomes eligible if the removal is reversed as a result of litigation or settlement, is restored to an AFGE Bargaining Unit position,
- and finally, any otherwise eligible grievant who raised a claim of age discrimination must sign a release to receive the proportional share of the settlement.

Council 220 Needs Your “Like”

Union Utilizes Social Media to Engage Members

Members of the bargaining unit are encouraged to follow Council 220 on social media — including the Council’s Facebook page, RallyPoint. Council 220 posts the most current information to the fb page, as well as messages direct from Council President Witold Skwierczynski. AFGE Council 220 can also be found on twitter — follow our tweets! @rallypt4ssaafge. Let’s use social media to Rally!
April 19, 2015 marked the 20th anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombing that destroyed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building and took the lives of 168 men, women, and children while injuring 680 others.

A ceremony held in front of the memorial at SSA Headquarters in Baltimore, MD on April 17, 2015 honored those SSA workers who were killed in the senseless terrorist act.

Witold Skwierczynski, President AFGE Council 220, and Stacy Rodgers, SSA Chief of Staff, spoke at the ceremony. Mr. Skwierczynski spoke of the tragedy which claimed so many lives—including 15 SSA employees, 1 SSA volunteer and 40 customers in the SSA field office.

“The tragedy was especially senseless since those SSA employees who were killed were simply dedicated to providing vital Social Security insurance services to retirees, survivors, disabled people and the SSI poor,” said Mr. Skwierczynski.

“What conceivable reason would anyone have to murder those dedicated to insuring the financial security of the most vulnerable population?” continued Skwierczynski.

“Although we are more secure today due to the union’s insistence on installing extensive security devices in field offices, more needs to be done such as installing metal detectors in every field office and card center, conducting universal bag searches of the public, confiscating weapons and designing and building more secure interviewing areas” stated Mr. Skwierczynski.

Thirty-five AFGE brothers and sisters who worked in the Department of Housing and Urban Development also died that day.

The 1995 bombing was carried out by domestic terrorists Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols. Both men were angry with the federal government over perceived slights, and they sought to make a statement by destroying federal property and taking the lives of government employees.

AFGE remembers the lives lost, and celebrates our union brothers and sisters and all those who continue to serve through federal service.