The member Locals of AFGE Council 220 met in Convention from August 14-15, 2015 in Orlando, FL. Present were 105 delegates representing 35 Locals.

The Convention convened with remarks by Council President Witold Skwierczynski, who noted that the Council “honored our organizing and made great success, influenced Congress on office closings, had bills introduced on our issues, produced three Dear Colleague letters, got more money for administrative expenses, prevented office closings and stopped [the progression] of VISION 2025.”

President Skwierczynski noted the efforts the Council made to create alliances with third parties such as Social Security Works, connections which helped mobilize workers and Congress to action. David Sheagley was recognized for his efforts with GNAT – the Grassroots National Action Team, the AFGE initiative to stop VISION 2025’s implementation. President Skwierczynski thanked Eric Shulman for his effective lobbying which resulted in increasing funding and staffing in the last two fiscal years, and the introduction of report language that both preserved benefit verifications for the public, and made it difficult for the Agency to close offices. In fact, this work has prevented SSA from closing any offices since March 2014.

The Convention delegates made recommendations on several topics, including: improvements to Training for Union Representatives; needed Legislative Action and Budget concerns; continuing support for AFGE’s GNAT; issues at the TSCs with electronic monitoring, leave and increased workloads; council publications and outreach initiatives; telework implementation; ergonomics issues; potential furloughs and shutdowns, veterans issues; up-coming 2016 Contract negotiations; as well as the implementation of labor-management forums for pre-decisional input at all levels.

Pending litigation was discussed, as were current Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) issues.

President Skwierczynski thanked Jackie Burke, Dana Duggins and Jill Hornick, all three of which were primarily responsible for organizing the Convention.

Three retiring Executive Officers were acknowledged and presented with farewell gifts in recognition of their service to the Council, including: Terry Duncan, Council Treasurer; Steve Kofahl, 3rd VP and Assistant Chairperson of the Legislative Action Committee; and Jim Campana, Council 220 2nd VP. President Skwierczynski, along with the rest of the delegation, thanked them for their long-time service.

“Steve has been a good friend and an effective legislative leader,” President Skwierczynski concluded.

By Cari Watson
Council 220 Editor

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We’ve all seen that SSA is strong-arming the public into online and third-party services — but you may not be aware that SSA’s efforts are picking up speed.

Recently SSA amended POMS to support VISION 2025 and actually changed the “definition of ‘in-person’ to include the video/kiosk channel.” SSA KNOWS via third-party investigations that its cybersecurity is woefully inadequate. SSA also knows from its own OIG investigations that its online services allow fraud, produce missed entitlements, and totally disadvantage vulnerable populations.

The Agency is espousing employee empowerment in its VISION 2025 plan, yet it unilaterally consolidated position descriptions without Union pre-decisional input. SSA also continues to use a performance appraisal system (PACS) that has been proven to be discriminatory.

To be sure, Social Security is steamrolling the American people into bad service, while maneuvering to eliminate the jobs of the people it employs. As a bargaining unit, our strength is in our numbers. We, the people who perform the work, must continue to use our numbers to advocate for positive, common-sense change. If we don’t … all the things we stand for — primarily: quality, face-to-face live, IN-PERSON government services to the American people, and civil service with integrity — will fold.

To be sure, here now, is our generation’s test of solidarity.

The public forms a line outside of the Elkhart, IN office, waiting for in-person, face-to-face customer service on 09/14/15.
n many ways, Personal Assistants (PAs) are the eyes, ears and hands of the agency. They read for blind employees, reach and carry for the mobility impaired, and provide sign language interpretation for hearing impaired staff. In some cases, however, their assistance is not needed for a full work shift, and that’s where the improvisation begins.

In the first place, they are hired only for the PA jobs, with no promise of future promotions, yet they polish their resumes and do all they can to make a good impression because common sense tells them that there’s a future with SSA when openings occur.

Secondly, every office has jobs that were formerly done by clerical staff. SSA has significantly reduced the number of Developmental Clerks (DCs). Many jobs formerly done by DCs such as sorting faxes and mail, doing some data entry, and helping out with any other such jobs are now done by PAs. And that’s the problem.

When does data entry become Service Representative or Claims Representative work? In some offices, a PA staffs the Visitor Intake Computer. In other offices, a Claims Rep is assigned that task, because claims processing is a CR job and only a CR has the knowledge and experience to assist in taking claims.

In some offices CR’s enter data from paper representative payee applications, in others the PA’s have that duty.

All our offices are understaffed and managers are understandably happy to have an extra pair of hands available for the clerical work. But should PA’s be doing work outside of their position description and beyond their formal training? If SSA assigns PA’s work that is higher graded and takes at least 25% of their work time to do that work, the PA may be entitled to a grade increase.

PA’s often believe that the more work they willingly take on and perform well, the better their chances for promotion. This is not true, simply due to the nature of the PA position. And the last thing we want is to limit PA opportunities.

If a PA feels that they are engaged in performing uncompensated higher graded work, they should contact their Local AFGE representative for advice on possibly filing a back pay grievance. If the work was temporary, the employee may be eligible for back pay for a higher graded detail. If the work assignment is permanent, the employee may wish to file a classification appeal if such work activities constituted at least 25% of their work time.

PA’s should contact their Local Rep for information on how to successfully jump the hurdles facing them should they wish to pursue a different career path.

Are you signed up for AFGE Text Alerts?

Text AFGE to 225568

From your personal phone and never from a government phone.
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appraisal expert and longtime Local President,” said President Skwierczynski. “Terry,” he added, “made my job a lot easier. Her sound judgment and pragmatism in managing the Council’s money will translate into her work as a newly elected City Council Member.”

“Jim,” concluded President Skwierczynski, “was first elected to this board in 1988, and was made famous for his work on FLSA, and for [his] years reading suffer and permit reports, which resulted in a multi-million dollar settlement. He has been our 2nd VP in charge of ULPS, a respected leader. The Council will miss him a lot.”

Final business was the election of the Executive Committee. Skwierczynski was re-elected as Council President, Jeremy Maske was elected to the Position of 2nd VP and Jill Hornick was elected Secretary.

Elected by acclamation were: Dana Duggins of L3172 as EVP, Katrina Lopez of L3172 as 1st VP, Pam Baca of L1802 as 3rd VP, Michael Williams of L3448 as TSC VP, and Debbie Fredericksen of L3129 as Treasurer.

The officers were sworn in and the convention adjourned. The next National Convention will be held in Las Vegas in 2018.

In 2012, AFGE identified the urgent need for the purposeful education, empowerment, and training of the next generation of Union Leaders. As such, The Young Organizing Unionist for the Next Generation (YOUNG) movement—a group of enthusiastic young Unionists (ie, under age 40) within our federation—was founded at the 2012 National Convention.

Interested? Ask your Local to set up a YOUNG Committee. Ryan Gurganious is the AFGE National YOUNG Chair. He can be reached at ryan.gurganious@gmail.com.
On November 2, 2015, President Obama signed legislation that will fund the government through the end of FY 17. This legislation also increased the debt limit and shifted money from the retirement trust funds to the disability trust funds to prevent a potential reduction in beneficiary disability benefits in 2016.

The total budget passed on November 2, 2015 will be allocated to government agencies pursuant to the congressional appropriations process. SSA, Department of Human Resources, Department of Labor, Department of Education and other Agencies will compete for these appropriations. SSA’s ability to fund administrative expenses (i.e., employee salaries and benefits, rent for office space, travel, supplies, overtime, cost of technology, etc.) is dependent upon how much SSA is appropriated by Congress.

If Congress fails to appropriate the administrative funds requested by President Obama, SSA may still be forced to furlough employees for 5 to 10 days in FY 16, eliminate or severely reduce overtime, and/or freeze hiring.

As of this Unity’s press time Congress had not yet passed any of the 13 Appropriation bills. Please contact your Congressperson and your two Senators and ask them to support the President’s budget request for SSA. Call 1-888-907-8362 and follow the prompts.

Tell the Congressional staffer who you reach that you work for SSA and can attest to the need for the $12.513 billion in appropriations requested by the President. These monies are essential for SSA to provide proper service to the American people.
month before the planned consolidation.

According to her Facebook page, Grisham waited 3 hours to be seen at the office that normally sees 500-600 visitors a day. She found the overall conditions unacceptable. Grisham sent a letter directly to SSA’s Acting Commissioner Carolyn Colvin. In the letter, dated July 28, 2015, Grisham communicated her concern not only about the poor level of service at the Albuquerque office, but also about SSA’s plans to move the FO from its existing location and consolidate it with the Albuquerque TeleService Center (TSC) located downtown.

Despite the union and congressional concern, SSA moved the office on August 2, 2015. Visitors now have to pay for parking, which is a burdensome and unnecessary additional cost to many no-income or low-income claimants. There exists NO disabled drop-off zone at the new location, nor is there disability public parking within a two-block radius, as the location was initially designed in 2001 as a TSC, not a FO. Marrujo said that when the TSC was built, “we made sure it had no parking near it due to the Oklahoma City Bombing.”

Office space is so limited at the new location that additional employees cannot be added, nor can reasonable accommodations be made. There is simply no room.

SSA’s own reports on employee parking were inaccurate, and the agency had to rent a near-by parking garage to accommodate FO employees, which contradicts the agency’s “cost savings” justification for moving the FO in the first place.

SSA’s apparent lack of outreach to the local community about the move is also alarming. SSA alleges they contacted 30 media outlets and 80 third-party organizations, yet only ONE of the 21 similar community organizations contacted by Grisham’s staff said they had even heard of the move.

The agency re-routed all initial claims to other offices after the FO moved. Management put all 53 employees (including themselves) in the Front End Interviewing (FEI) area to call numbers to reduce wait times.

As such, wait times have been minimal, with about 300-400 people checking in a day. This can be attributed to the fact that: many claimants don’t know where the new location is, they can’t afford to travel there, they can’t physically get to an office designed to prevent access, and the entire staff is calling numbers at the expense of all other workloads.

The consolidated location also has self-help PC’s, staffed with trained personnel, to help claimants file online. These i-claims are credited as successful submissions, and SSA uses these statistics to justify continued reduction in staff, reduction in infrastructure, and poor personal customer service to the American people.

SSA management points to the low wait times and i-filings as a reflection of a successful transition, when in reality they are a reflection of the agency manipulating statistics to suit its purpose and calm congressional outrage.

The re-routing of claims ended September 1, 2015, and with it likely will come increased wait times as FO staff resume their previous duties.

“The congresswoman has done a terrific job,” Marrujo said.

It appears, though, that the Congresswoman’s efforts may be too little, too late.
The State of Hawaii is often referred to as the “Paradise of the Pacific.” Yet, for SSA employees in the Hawaiian Islands, Guam, Saipan or American Samoa, the agency’s anti-union action has made working there far from ideal.

For nearly a decade, the nine offices in this area have had no active representation to protect the rights of employees. As a result, management routinely retaliated and discriminated against workers, made changes with no notice to the union, and aggressively suppressed union activity.

Leading the anti-union charge were Kapolei Manager Sami Omari and Assistant Manager Anthony Tarrant. Eventually, Theresa McMoore, an SR in Kapolei, had decided this maltreatment had gone on long enough. She began the process of organizing the employees, and in April of 2013, was elected Local President of 1212. In 2012, Pres. McMoore had been promoted to a claims representative after several years of glowing PACS reviews as a SR. Within a month of her election as President, Ms. Omari and Mr. Tarrant began their assault on her performance.

Over the next 2 years, Theresa faced insurmountable reprisal for her work on behalf of employees. The Kapolei managers concocted reason after reason to justify their unfair treatment and deny her grade increases. Despite the retaliation, Pres. McMoore presses on.

Pres. McMoore is bolstered by the gains made and the progress still to come. Membership on the islands has increased and the local received an award for most growth at the 40th National Convention held in August 2015.

Pres. McMoore says it is her job to “be the voice of many who are afraid to speak up in fear of retaliation and losing their jobs”. She is determined to make that voice count.
Albuquerque FO Consolidates

With downtown TSC on August 3, 2015—Problems Ensue

SSA's consolidation of the Albuquerque field office with the local TSC on August 3, 2015 has caused headaches to employees and claimants alike. AFGE and SSA attempted to negotiate an agreement on the consolidation but reached an Impasse in the negotiations.

"We took the move to the IMPASSE panel, and we lost," said Local 4041 President Josie Marrujo. [The Federal Service Impasses Panel (FSIP) is an independent agency that is empowered to resolve union-management bargaining disputes in the federal government.] Marrujo has been working with area Congresswoman Michelle Lujan Grisham to provide as much relief to SSA employees and the public as possible after the move.

The congresswoman initially brought attention to the poor service provided at the Albuquerque, New Mexico office with an undercover visit on Monday July 7, 2015, to the FO's former location on Cutler Ave, about one

They have moved the office into an office that doesn’t fit — not for parking, staffing, or public use.

—Josie Marrujo, Local 4041 President