

National Council Digest

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An official publication of the National Council of SSA Field Operations Locals

AFGE-LMR Meeting

AFGE Council 220 President Witold Skwierczynski met with the new director of Social Security's Office of Labor and Employee Relations, Milt Beever. The two met to review problems arising from the implementation of the new national contract.

SSA indicated that it was not prepared to implement several contract articles including 17 (Awards), 21 (Performance), 22 (Within-grade increases) and 26 (Merit Promotion). These will be effectuated later in the year.

The union voiced particular concern over problems associated with implementation of Article 30, Official Time. Reports from around the nation indicate local managers had placed additional restrictions on the use of representational time not envisioned during the national contract bargaining.

At some locations, managers were insisting that representatives authorized to use 50 percent official time had to perform an equal amount of claims-related work (an hour for hour replacement) instead of the actual hours agreed to during bargaining (1040 representational hours for the year). Beever agreed that the one-for-one replacement requirement was a contract violation.

The union had previously designated official time hours for local and national representatives in varying amounts depending upon need. This is especially important now since official time availability has been significantly reduced.

But, SSA has so far refused to recognize hourly allocations and has unilaterally authorized local union representatives in many locations to use more time than the union has provided. Beever said he would investigate the problem and get back to the union.

Some managers have been "looking over the local AFGE rep's shoulder" demanding they track every minute of official time use. The union said that if an employee had only a brief question that it would take more time to request official time and for management to respond to the request than to just let the union rep address the employee's concern. Beever said he would consider a "five-minute rule" and advise the union.

Union reps in some locations were told they had to obtain approval for conducting union activities during lunch and breaks. Such requirements were inappropriate according to OLMER.

SSA training of union officials who are no longer on 100 percent official time needs to be scheduled so that union members can continue to receive representation during the training period. Skwierczynski stated that he was aware that management has indicated it may want to send union representatives to 17-week claims representative training classes and that would directly interfere with the union's responsibility to provide fair representation to bargaining unit members. Beever responded that the agency has a "different view" of the problem, but agreed to further discussions.

Management has also made demands for additional information when union representatives request official time via OUTFs. Skwierczynski referred to requirements in the contract and verbal agreements reached during bargaining that

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The **National Council Digest** returns after a two-year hiatus as an online newsletter. The **Digest** is an official newsletter of AFGE Council 220, which represents SSA Field Operations employees.

Articles to be covered in these pages will cover labor relations and other work-related concerns affecting our bargaining unit employees. If you have grievances, arbitrations and other appeals, MOUs or other LMR and personnel-related matters that you wish to share with your fellow AFGE union representatives and/or members, contact Digest editor Warren Fretwell at AFGEWCF@aol.com or call 315-479-0064, FAX 315-479-0063.

This document and can be forwarded to your AFGE representatives and members via email.

A Labor Day Message From AFGE President John Gage

The devastation and lingering effects of Hurricane Katrina are deeply saddening. The disorder in New Orleans serves as a reminder of the consequences that ensue when a government is forced to abandon its people, even if only temporarily

Thousands of dedicated government employees stand ready for their orders. Indeed many government employees already are contributing to efforts to rescue the stranded, offer comfort and assistance to the displaced, and help restore order to areas where little governmental presence remains.

Federal employees have stood strong at their posts because of their dedication to the Americans they serve, despite their own personal losses and the difficult circumstances under which they now must toil.

The relief effort has prompted an outpouring of volunteerism and charity by federal employees as well. Agencies are scrambling to provide assistance in whatever way they can, asking employees to put in extra hours and forming work groups to complete required tasks. Federal employees, like some 250 customs and border protection officers of the Department of Homeland Security, are volunteering to travel to the areas hit by the hurricane to provide needed assistance.

These moments showcase the true dedication of America's workforce, our federal employees, to take the necessary actions to complete their appointed missions.

For those of you who are unable to assist the relief effort in person, AFGE is coordinating fund-raising efforts with the AFL-CIO and the Federal Employees Education and Assistance Fund. Any level of financial contribution is welcome and will be appreciated.

As government employees you honor our nation and reinforce our national spirit of community. And so AFGE would like to honor you.

In addition to converting a significant portion of the AFGE Web site (*AFGE.org*) to a repository of information on the relief effort, we are asking that AFGE members and non-members alike utilize *UnionBlog* to share with the nation your personal testimonials of our massive national effort.

We want to learn what sorts of challenges relief workers face on the ground.

We want to know your observations and professional assessments.

We want to hear personal accounts of dedication and bravery.

We hope you will share with us the stories of successes large and small, and help us to comprehend the depth and breadth of the devastation visited upon our land by a storm named Katrina.

(This is an abbreviated version of President Gage's Labor Day message.)

AFGE-LMR Meeting

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ask union representatives to account for only the broad subject matter as outlined in Article 30, Section 5 [A][4]. Beever disagreed, paving the way for grievances on this matter.

The agency did agree, however, that there wasn't any mandatory time limit during which a union official had to request official time. Some managers have been insisting upon a 24-hour advance notice. OLMER says this is inappropriate.

Union officials in some offices have advised of delayed responses to their requests to use representational time, often due to management absences from the office. Beever indicated that this should not be a problem because someone in management is "always in charge of every office and empowered to decide leave requests."

An interesting problem occurred in New York City when Local 3369 arranged to have a union meeting after office hours, something the contract allows. In fact, both Beever and Skwierczynski agreed that the limitations on union use of office space applied to locations that were not open after regular duty hours and not to facilities that remain open such as the PSC where the Local planned to hold its meeting.

Management officials in New York continued to refuse to allow the Local to conduct its meeting despite OLMER's acknowledgement that the contract granted the union the right to access the office. Local 3369 was encouraged to rent space and file a grievance against SSA seeking damages for any incurred costs.

If you are having additional difficulties associated with Article 30, please advise your regional vice president.