

**NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SSA FIELD OPERATIONS LOCALS
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO**

Representing over 25,000 Social Security Employees working in over 1,300 field installations and 36 teleservice centers across the nation, Puerto Rico and Pacific Islands

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: August 3, 2011

TO: Executive Committee and Local Presidents

FROM: Witold Skwierczynski
President

SUBJECT: Office Hour Changes

On 7/21/11 I was mysteriously asked to attend a meeting the following day with Ralph Patinella, OLMER, regarding an undisclosed topic.

On 7/22/11 I met Mr. Patinella at the agreed upon time and he took me to the 9th Floor of the Altmeyer Building again without giving me any indication of the subject of the meeting.

I was led to a conference room and was informed that Carolyn Colvin, Principle Deputy Commissioner, wanted to inform me about something.

Principal Deputy Commissioner Colvin was not present in the meeting room but she suddenly was visible on a videoconference screen. Apparently she was in Washington DC.

Also in the conference room were Karen Ames, Milt Beever's new Deputy, Milt Beever, Ralph Patinella, Doc Smallwood, and Terri Gruber of Operations.

Deputy Commissioner Colvin informed me that Commissioner Astrue had decided that effective 8/15/11 all SSA field offices would close to the public 30 minutes

earlier than their present closing time. The rationale given for the decision was to reduce the need for overtime to cover late interviews.

I was informed that SSA had lost through attrition 1600 field office employees in the last 6 months. Due to the hiring freeze, these vacancies have not been filled. Thus, there were fewer employees available to cover late interviews.

Deputy Commissioner Colvin also informed me that the Commissioner had decided to close all field offices to the public on the day after Thanksgiving. I was informed that SSA would approve all bargaining unit employee leave requests that day in both field offices and teleservice centers providing that there were enough employees to answer the telephones in field offices. (All field offices have assigned a certain number of employees to answer telephones. It is my expectation that that number will be constant or less for the day after Thanksgiving. It may be less since Ms. Gruber stated at the meeting that the day after Thanksgiving is the slowest phone day of the year.) All other employees who request leave should be granted leave. Leave rosters should not be used on the day after Thanksgiving.

I protested the failure of SSA to give the union an opportunity for pre-decisional involvement through the Forums process on the issue of early office closings and closings on the day after Thanksgiving. Ms. Colvin said that there was no time to provide the union with pre-decisional involvement. I disputed this contention. I told her that I had read Congressional testimony weeks before where Commissioner Astrue suggested early office closings as an option that he was considering. This issue certainly could have been addressed at the July 13 Forums meeting. Deputy Commissioner Colvin responded by saying that SSA will have to try to improve their pre-decisional involvement activity with the union.

I indicated that if offices were closing 30 minutes early that SSA managers who have employed a second shift in field offices should either eliminate that 2nd shift or reduce the number of employees on the 2nd shift if evidence would indicate that it's still needed to some degree for late interviews.

Terri Gruber stated that SSA had anticipated that I would bring up the issue of the need for a 2nd shift in response to the early closing of offices. She stated that managers would be informed to review the need for the 2nd shift and the number of employees required for the 2nd shift where that shift will continue to exist.

ACTION: ALL LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES IN OFFICE THAT HAVE A SECOND SHIFT SHOULD DEMAND THAT THE MANAGER ELIMINATE THE SECOND SHIFT. IF MANAGEMENT DECLINES, THE LOCAL REPS SHOULD DEMAND JUSTIFICATION FOR KEEPING THE SECOND SHIFT.

THE PURPOSE OF THE SECOND SHIFT IS SOLELY FOR LATE INTERVIEWS. THE SECOND SHIFT IS NOT FOR TELEPHONE COVERAGE, TELECLAIMS APPOINTMENTS OR FOR ANY OTHER WORK RELATED REASON. IF THE SECOND SHIFT CAN BE JUSTIFIED, LOCAL REPS SHOULD DEMAND THAT FEWER EMPLOYEES BE ASSIGNED TO THE SECOND SHIFT. ALSO, THIS IS A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY TO NEGOTIATE SHORTER ROTATION SCHEDULES FOR THE REMAINING EMPLOYEES ON THE SECOND SHIFT. IDEALLY ROTATION SHOULD BE DAILY SO THAT AN EMPLOYEE IS NOT STUCK ON THE SECOND SHIFT FOR LENGTHY PERIODS OF TIME.

ASK LOCAL REPS TO REPORT TO LOCAL PRESIDENTS WHETHER THEIR OFFICES HAVE A SECOND SHIFT AND THE ACTIONS THAT THEY TOOK TO ELIMINATE IT OR MINIMIZE IT. EMPLOYEES IN EACH OFFICE SHOULD BE INFORMED REGARDING UNION ACTION TO ELIMINATE/MINIMIZE SECOND SHIFTS.

Principal Deputy Commissioner Colvin also indicated that the early office closing would help employees address backlogs. I asked if there were any current backlogs that could be attributed to the staffing attrition. Terri Gruber responded that there weren't any backlogs in claims but that SSI diaries and overpayment diaries were "piling up". She expected more backlogs to emerge next year and the early closing would help address those backlogs.

I told Principal Deputy Commissioner Colvin that the impact of 1600 field office employees who left the Agency and were not replaced had to be uneven. Some offices were suffering more than others. I urged the Agency to consider more merit promotion opportunities to fill vacancies in offices hard hit by staffing losses. She said the Agency would consider it.

I asked if the Agency anticipated any changes in security guard coverage in view of the early office closings. Ms. Gruber stated that SSA did not expect any immediate changes in guard coverage. However, if the early office closing resulted in the public finishing their face-to-face business earlier, SSA might in the future consider adjusting security guard hours.

I informed Ms. Colvin that I anticipated that Congress would protest this initiative. I based this contention on the fact that previous attempts to pilot adjustments in office hours have led to widespread Congressional dissent.

Principal Deputy Commissioner Colvin informed me that SSA's Office of Communications would issue a press release on the early office closings and that there will also be local press release issuances.

I was asked by Ms. Colvin what I thought of the changes in office hours. I informed her that the union always has problems with providing the public with diminished face-to-face service opportunities and that we are troubled by SSA's increasing reliance on Internet service. I did state that the decision to close offices to the public on the day after Thanksgiving and to allow as many employees as possible to have off that day as something the union could support.

REGARDING THE DAY AFTER THANKSGIVING, THIS IS THE SLOWEST 800 NUMBER DAY OF THE YEAR ACCORDING TO TERRI GRUBER. ALL TSC EMPLOYEES WHO REQUEST LEAVE THAT DAY SHOULD BE GRANTED LEAVE. THE UNION AND MANAGEMENT ANTICIPATE THAT ENOUGH EMPLOYEES WILL CHOOSE TO WORK THAT DAY IN TSCs AND FOs SO THAT ALL LEAVE REQUESTS CAN BE APPROVED BY SSA MANAGEMENT.

I also addressed the issue of flex bands during this meeting. I indicated that it would be the union expectation that management would be open to expanding flex time since the offices would be open for a shorter period of time. It would certainly be possible to open offices at 6:30 AM instead of 7:00 AM since there will be a lesser need for coverage at the end of the day. Also, many offices already open their doors to the public before 9 AM providing additional justification for an earlier start time for the flex band, I stated that it was the union expectation that SSA would be more open in contract negotiations for the earlier flex band start time. (PLEASE LET ME KNOW WHAT YOU THINK OF EXPANDING FLEXBANDS (6:30 AM-9:00 AM) OR MOVING THE 2 HOUR BAND TO AN EARLIER TIME (6:30 AM-8:30 AM). PLEASE THINK OF THE BU REACTION RATHER THAN THE IMPACT ON JUST YOU.)

The union has requested bargaining on the impact of the change in office closing time on bargaining unit employees. We have not received a response to this bargaining request from SSA to date.

We are already hearing that some managers are changing work assignments, altering interview schedules, shortening interview appointment times, etc. due to the office hour reduction. Recent FLRA case law provides that the adverse impact of such changes is negotiable.

IF MANAGEMENT PROPOSES SUCH CHANGES IN WORK ASSIGNMENTS AND THESE CHANGES APPEAR TO ADVERSELY AFFECT EMPLOYEES, INSTRUCT THE LOCAL REPS TO DEMAND BARGAINING. IF MANAGEMENT REFUSES TO BARGAIN, FILE ULPS. ASK THE LOCAL REPS TO SEND TO YOU ALL CHANGES IN WORK ASSIGNMENTS DUE TO OFFICE HOUR REDUCTIONS SO THAT YOU CAN MONITOR THEIR REQUESTS FOR BARGAINING AND THE NEED TO FILE ULPS IF SSA REFUSES SUCH LOCAL BARGAINING REQUESTS.

cc: M. Marsh
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