



THE GOVERNMENT STANDARD

For current and retired government workers and their families since 1933 • American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO

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Still in the Fight

The November elections have come and gone, and while many of the candidates AFGE supported were defeated at the polls, **we are not defeated!**

We knew this was going to be a tough two years for public servants on Capitol Hill, regardless of who took office.

In fact, we are more determined than ever to fight for your interests. AFGE will work with anyone from any political party who is willing to stand up and support working people. But make no mistake – we will fight with all our might to protect the interests of our members and the programs and services you deliver.

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A Message from AFGE's National President *J. David Cox Sr.*

Many of you are understandably disappointed that the candidates AFGE had supported in the November election did not prevail. I wish the election had gone a different way too. But watching the results come in that Tuesday night and into Wednesday morning, what I felt most of all was pride – pride in our amazing AFGE family for your tireless efforts this campaign season.

The task ahead of us will no doubt be hard, but you have proven time and time again what this union can accomplish in tough times. We've endured lockouts, furloughs, pay freezes, and retirement cuts; whatever the politicians threw at us, we survived and grew stronger.

As we stand at the doorstep of a new, more anti-union Congress, we need to be ready to face any challenge that comes our way.

No doubt about it, we're going to be in for some bitter fights during these next two years. There are forces in Washington who would like nothing better than to slash your pay and benefits, outsource your jobs, and even eliminate agencies altogether.

If we are going to build a union that's big enough, strong enough, and loud enough to make a difference in the next election, then there's only one thing we can do – ORGANIZE, ORGANIZE, ORGANIZE!

AFGE is the only group out there exclusively fighting for your interests. We are the only ones fighting to increase your pay and preserve your benefits, to improve working conditions by getting you the training and resources you need, and to protect your jobs from across-the-board budget cuts.

But you know what, brothers and sisters? Size does matter.

If we have any hope of building support for federal and D.C. public servants with

this incoming Congress, we need to grow our membership to such a level that we simply cannot be ignored.

And let me be clear: recruiting new members isn't just a job for our national organizers and local presidents, despite the fantastic job they do. It is up to each of you to spread the word about AFGE and what it means to be part of the union family.

If every one of our existing members signed up just one new employee, we would double our membership overnight. A journey of a thousand miles is made in countless small steps. That's what it's going to take to build a union that's big enough to win.

In Solidarity,

AFGE—THE GOVERNMENT STANDARD

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(from cover)

At the end of the day, we're always going to do what's best for federal and D.C. public servants, and we're going to use every resource at our disposal to protect your pay, benefits, and jobs from whatever challenges lie ahead.

Main priorities for the 114th Congress

Even before the election results were in, AFGE was busy formulating our list of immediate priorities for the outgoing Congress and the new leadership that will take over in January. Our main goals are to:

- Pass a **long-term funding measure** in the lame duck session that keeps the government open through the remainder of the current fiscal year. Federal agencies need a full-year budget approved by Congress that allows them to meet their obligations to taxpayers and employees.
- Get to work on **cancelling the reckless sequester** right away, while preserving the critical government programs the American people count on. No matter who is in charge, no one will be able to govern effectively unless sequestration is repealed and federal programs and services are protected from these devastating cuts.
- Get our members the **real pay increase** you deserve and defend your retirement benefits. More than any other group of Americans, you have paid the price for fiscal austerity through pay freezes, retirement cuts, and furloughs. We will vigorously fight any future measures that place disproportionate pain from budget politics on the backs of public servants.

Increased focus on organizing

In order to get our legislative agenda through the 114th Congress, it's more important than ever that we **grow a union** so large that we will be impossible to ignore.

AFGE is going all-in on our organizing efforts – signing up employees who are currently represented by AFGE but haven't yet joined, and reaching out to the 500,000 employees who are currently unrepresented by any union. We need to hold more organizing events and encourage current members to sign up their coworkers and act as ambassadors for the union.

Our membership has been growing year over year for the past decade, but we must do more if we are going to be able to build support in Congress for the initiatives you care most about.

Wage increases on the horizon

One bright spot from the November election was the overwhelming support voters showed to measures **increasing the minimum wage**. Voters passed binding initiatives to raise the minimum wage in four states – Alaska, Arkansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota – and passed a nonbinding initiative to raise the wage in Illinois.

Especially notable was the fact that the four states passing the binding wage increases all sent Republicans to the Senate in the same election. That sends a strong message to Congress that regardless of party politics, they need to be on the side of working people and promote policies that improve wages and benefits for all workers.

The only way we are going to accomplish our objectives and move this country forward in a direction that benefits working people is by expanding the labor movement. By organizing new AFGE members and strengthening our relationships with fellow unions and pro-worker groups, we can build a union that is big enough to win the future of our choice!



Changes on the Horizon with New VA Leadership

Whistleblower Protection



VA Secretary Robert McDonald presents his vision for a more accessible and accountable department before AFGE's National VA Council.

AFGE is cautiously optimistic about the progress made with VA's recent certification on whistleblower protection. Through the Office of Special Counsel's (OSC) 2302(c) Whistleblower Protection Certification Program, VA has taken a key step toward compliance with federal laws protecting employees who identify or report problems

Following the crisis that hit the Department of Veterans Affairs earlier this year and the confirmation of Robert McDonald as Secretary, big changes are starting to take shape at the agency.

During a September visit to AFGE headquarters, Secretary McDonald delivered an impassioned presentation at the AFGE National VA Council labor-management meeting, laying out a clear vision focused on providing timely, quality, and innovative care to our nation's heroes. In doing so, McDonald stressed the importance of partnering with frontline employees who deliver care to veterans every day. Here are some of the changes currently underway, and how AFGE is advocating for better treatment for employees and veterans:

Hiring

VA is launching a new recruiting campaign to fill critical shortages in health care workers, including doctors and nurses, at many VA facilities. VA also is providing training to about 10,000 schedulers to ensure veterans and their family members are taken off waitlists and seen by medical professionals as soon as possible.

Secretary McDonald also announced increasing the pay rates of physicians and dentists to attract more health care professionals to work for the VA. While increasing the pay rates for VA doctors and dentists should help the department recruit additional providers to treat our veterans, VA still needs to tackle troubling retention and retaliation problems.

from retaliation.

AFGE is a staunch advocate for whistleblowers, and many frontline employees we represent have risked their careers to come forward to expose wrongdoing. Through the certification program, informational posters on prohibited personnel practices, whistleblowing and whistleblower retaliation will be clearly displayed; new employees will be provided written information on these issues, and management officials are required to complete training on whistleblower rights and protections.

Though this is certainly a step in the right direction, we still must recognize the continued culture of fear and intimidation that exists at many local VA medical centers, benefits offices and other work stations.

Downgrades

In keeping with Secretary McDonald's commitment to AFGE and its National VA Council to reverse harmful downgrades of medical center employees who interface with patients, the department ordered top leadership to delay grade reductions for 17 targeted positions covering nearly 21,000 lower wage employees. No downgrades of targeted positions will be conducted for at least another 15 months (as of September 24th), to allow completion of a national classification review.

VA leadership also was given the authority to reverse recent hiring practices that brought in new employees at significantly lower salaries, forcing them to work alongside current employees performing the same jobs involving direct services to veterans. Hiring managers now can elect to post new jobs at the same grade as incumbents in positions on the target list.

Half a Million People Demand End to SSA Office Closures



AFGE Council 220 President Witold Skwirczynski addresses the crowd at the Social Security office in Washington, D.C.

AFGE’s campaign to save the Social Security Administration as we know it is gaining ground. On Oct. 2, AFGE and its coalition partners Social Security Works and the Alliance for Retired Americans took the fight to save Social Security community offices to the front door of SSA.

In four cities – Cleveland, Ohio; Washington, D.C.; New York City; and Oakland, Calif. – union activists and Social Security beneficiaries delivered a petition with more than

500,000 signatures to agency representatives.

The petition demands that SSA recommit to providing face-to-face service in communities across the country and to stop closing community offices. SSA already has closed more than 80 offices and plans to force beneficiaries to interact with the agency almost exclusively online.

“Many people who rely on Social Security are the least likely to have knowledge, ability, and resources to use the Internet services,” AFGE Council 220 President Witold Skwirczynski told the crowd at the Washington, D.C., rally. “Moreover, 95 percent of people who’ve filed for benefits online have to be contacted again because of missing information. People need experts to guide them.” In addition to the petition, AFGE has lobbied hard for two pieces of legislation to keep offices open and save essential services offered at these offices. Thus far, Council 220 has seen progress in saving benefit verification forms and expanding the public’s knowledge about the risk of office closures.

During Diversity Week, AFGE activists were joined by Reps. Steny Hoyer and Keith Ellison in a rally outside a Minneapolis Social Security office to protest the agency’s policy on shortening the hours that community offices are open to the public.

To learn more about the effort to save community offices, visit www.afge.org/saveoursocialsecurity.

Ryan, Issa Move Forward with Plans to Gut Federal Employees’ Retirement

Reps. Paul Ryan (Wis.) and Darrell Issa (Calif.) are asking the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) to prepare a report discussing long-term savings from their proposed cuts to federal employees’ retirement benefits.

In a letter to CBO Director Douglas Elmendorf, Ryan and Issa – chairmen of House Budget Committee and House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, respectively, asked the CBO to discuss taking money out of federal employees’ pockets from different options based on changes recently made to other pension plans both in public and private sectors.

Ryan has proposed a huge cut to federal employees’



Rep. Paul Ryan



Rep. Darrell Issa

retirement benefits by requiring them to pay 5.5% more into their pensions. For Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) employees hired before 2013, their contributions would go from 0.8% to 6.3%. Civil Service Retirement System employees would see their contributions go up from 7% to 12.5%. Ryan and his colleagues have also proposed to eliminate a supplemental benefit for FERS employees who retire before age 62.

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Activists Gather in Minneapolis for AFGE Diversity Week

In August, more than 500 AFGE activists from across the country gathered in Minneapolis, Minn., for AFGE's 2nd Annual Diversity Week. This year's Diversity Week included AFGE's 3rd Annual Young Organizing Unionists for the Next Generation (YOUNG) Training Summit, the 2nd Annual AFGE Pride Training Summit and the Human Rights Training Conference. Participants of the YOUNG

Training Summit raised community awareness about sexual and gender violence, while activists at the Human Rights Training Conference rallied against Social Security office closures outside of a local Minneapolis office.

Take a look at our photo collage and see if someone you know attended Diversity week!



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A New Way to Contribute to PAC



A FGE's MyPAC App is officially here! Now you can quickly and easily make a contribution to AFGE PAC directly from your mobile device or desktop computer.

As you know, contributions to AFGE PAC are more crucial now than ever before. AFGE uses PAC contributions to support candidates and lawmakers who fight with public servants on issues like fair pay increases, good retirement benefits, and job security.

Through the MyPAC app, you can easily help your fellow union family members contribute to PAC. The more

members we register to participate in PAC, the stronger our collective voice becomes. In September, AFGE saw a net increase of 90 new automatic monthly contributors – the most AFGE has ever signed up in one month.

But this is not nearly enough to compete with the big boys. The only way to beat the anti-government billionaires funding bad politicians is for hundreds of thousands of AFGE members to get in the game and become regular contributors.

If every AFGE member contributed just \$10 a pay period, AFGE PAC would rival the biggest traditional PACs in the country. Imagine what we could accomplish on pay, benefits, and working conditions with that type of influence. By signing up as a monthly contributor, you are taking us one step closer to turning that dream into a reality.

Visit www.afge.org/pac to find instructions on how to download the app to your desktop computer, iPhone or Android phone. You will find simple video instructions on how to download the app and make a contribution. You can also see how your Local ranks against other PAC contributors.

Contribute today at www.afge.org/mypac and ask your fellow union family to support the cause.

AFGE 2015 LEGISLATIVE & GRASSROOTS MOBILIZATION CONFERENCE
 February 8 – 11, 2015

The 2015 Legislative & Grassroots Mobilization Conference in Washington, D.C., Feb. 8 – 11, 2015. Join your AFGE Family in taking the fight for good pay, benefits, and jobs straight to Capitol Hill. Visit www.afge.org/LegCon2015 for more information.

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AFGE Thanks our AFGE PAC Donors

When we elect the right people to represent us, public servants win. When our elected officials work with us, we get fair pay increases, good benefits, and secure jobs. When they work against

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us, we see pay freezes, retirement cuts, and furloughs. Your donation to AFGE PAC helps us support pro-worker candidates who will do right by us in office. We want to thank our AFGE PAC donors who have contributed \$300 or more to make our union Big Enough to Win. Visit www.afge.org/myPAC to make your contribution today!

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AFGE Celebrates First-Ever Federal Nurses Week

A FGE launched the first-ever Federal Nurses Week Sept. 22-28. With leadership from the AFGE Nurse Steering Committee and the AFGE National Veterans Affairs Council, this designated week will become an annual celebration of the service and contributions of all federal employees in the nursing profession.

To celebrate, AFGE circulated shareable social media graphics for members to post on their Facebook and Twitter pages, developed a dedicated web page on the AFGE.org site, highlighted the personal stories of AFGE members in the nursing profession, promoted the event in the media, and helped members submit letters to the editor to their local papers about the importance of federal nurses.

“In so many different ways, public servants are working diligently to serve and protect us,” said AFGE National President J. David Cox Sr., the sole nurse serving on the national executive board of the AFL-CIO.

“Nurses in the federal sector are often overlooked and we’re advocating to change that. As a nurse who spent more than 20 years serving veterans, I know firsthand the sacrifice and dedication federal nurses bring to their jobs.”

AFGE is also working with members of Congress to gain national recognition of Federal Nurses Week through legislation. This designated week encouraged workers and agencies around the country to host celebratory events and tackle issues that directly impact federal nurses such as safe staffing, training and overtime limits.



“When we established the Nurse Steering Committee within AFGE, we set out to fully represent the issues facing nurses at the federal level,” AFGE District 8 National Vice President Jane Nygaard said. “Through that representation we have faced difficult issues and uphill battles. But we’ve also strengthened our appreciation for the work of our nurses. We want to uplift and celebrate those who are working in often very challenging circumstances.”

Nurses fill the ranks of patient care staff in various other federal agencies as well. Federal nurses staff the Indian Health Service and the National Institutes of Health, caring for economically disadvantaged and uniquely ill patients. They also deliver care in dangerous and demanding environments, such as the Bureau of Prisons.

“Federal Nurses Week provides us an opportunity to expand our advocacy and celebration of dedicated public servants,” AFGE NVAC President Alma Lee said. “Our pride in representing federal nurses at the worksite is only surpassed by their passion for caring for all patients with love, compassion and professionalism.”



AFGE Springs into Action to Protect Employees from Ebola



Office of Personnel Management Director Katherine Archuleta to demand regular briefings and updates for employee representatives and agency leaders.

We also have had discussions with high-level leaders from the Defense, Veterans Affairs, and Homeland Security departments, as well as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

AFGE's main concern is to ensure employees receive thorough training on how to protect themselves and the public, the highest quality protective gear, and any other equipment or measures as recommended by federal agencies and medical authorities.

We have also requested that that anyone exposed or potentially exposed to the deadly virus be granted 21 days of paid administrative leave while on quarantine. For those assigned to combat the virus in West Africa, we have urged additional precautions in addition to hazardous duty pay.

"AFGE is staying on top of this unfolding crisis to ensure our members and all public-sector employees are provided with every possible precautionary measure, protective equipment, and up-to-date information," Cox said.

Your safety is AFGE's number one priority. That's why we sprung into action when the Ebola virus first landed on American shores.

AFGE National President J. David Cox Sr. formed an Ebola task force immediately after the first case was reported in the United States. President Cox spoke personally with

For more information on AFGE's Ebola response and how to protect yourself from the virus, visit www.afge.org/ebola.

Pay Update: 1% Raise for All in 2015

First, the good news: Every federal employee will receive a 1 percent across-the-board pay raise in 2015. That includes salaried employees in the General Schedule and hourly workers under the prevailing wage system.

Now, the bad: The increase is far too miniscule to make up for three years of frozen wages, lost pay due to sequestration, and higher living costs.

AFGE continues to work with our advocates on Capitol Hill to raise awareness of the pay inequalities currently facing our members. Among the action items on our agenda:

- Providing all employees with a meaningful pay raise in 2016 that closes the wage gap between federal and

private-sector employees.

- Establishing new pay localities in cities where wages and salaries are well below what employees should be earning.
- Aligning locality boundaries so hourly and salaried federal employees who work in the same location are treated the same when it comes drawing local pay area boundaries.

"Despite all the rhetoric about federal employees being overpaid, wage surveys from the Bureau of Labor Statistics reveal the truth: Federal employees are paid on average 35 percent below private-sector employees doing the same level of work," AFGE National President J. David Cox Sr. said. "The administration can help close that gap by taking these few simple steps, and we won't let up until that happens."

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