



# THE GOVERNMENT STANDARD

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

July/August 2014

Vol. LXXXI, No 4

## It's Time to Staff the VA

### THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

OPINION

TOP STORIES IN OPINION

#### Don't Blame VA's Unionized Workers

### THE HUFFINGTON POST

#### Want to End Secret Wait Lists? Staff the VA

Log in 640 57 2 16

### North Dallas Gazette

#### VA Employees' Union demands protection for whistleblowers

### AFGE

### THE HUFFINGTON POST

Follow

#### Employees, Unions Hold the Key to Ending VA's Health Care Crisis



#### VA Employees' Union Calls for End to "Culture of Fear" for Whistleblowers AFGE demands protections for employees willing to speak out on management malfeasance

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Anti-labor activists who want to take away your collective bargaining rights wasted no time in blaming AFGE and other unions for the management, funding and performance problems plaguing the VA's health care system. They would rather tear down unions than focus on the real issue: hiring the frontline caregivers needed to heal these veterans.

A columnist in the Wall Street Journal, the most widely read newspaper in the country, faulted employee representatives working on official time – even though our VA representatives account for less than one-tenth of one percent of the VA's total workforce. A similar attack was repeated on Dow Jones' MarketWatch website.

(continued on page 3)



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

Imagine a government where workers never receive a pay increase, retirement costs triple, health care benefits are voucherized, and one employee must do the work that was once done by three. Now imagine that these employees' union was stripped of its ability to protect their workplace rights and financial security. Is that a world you would choose to live in?

Well, if you don't make your voice heard in this November's elections, you won't have a choice.

If you thought that the last four years were bad, the results of this year's election could make them look like a vacation. Over the next several months, you will hear countless individuals pontificate about how this is the most important election for one reason or another. Do not let these distractions lead you astray.

**The real issues in this election are keeping your family fed, your job protected, and your rights intact.**

Over the past two years, we have seen the majority party in the House of Representatives vote to freeze federal pay for an additional three years, eliminate federal pensions outright, eliminate union official time to protect employee rights, and slash over 150,000 jobs, among others. Their agenda is clear and unequivocal: privatize government services to the lowest bidder and break government unions.

**With the recent pay freeze and pension contribution increases, the anti-government ideologues made serious progress toward their goal. The only procedural barrier to them completing their vision has been their legislative counterpart, the United States Senate.**

Time and time again, the Senate majority has voted to stop these reckless attacks on government employees. Remember the shutdown? It was the Senate that voted to end it. What about sequestration? The Senate voted to replace it and stop furloughs once and for all. Without the Senate majority in place today, government employment as we know it would quickly become a thing of the past.

Brothers and sisters, our mission between now and November is clear: we must defend the pro-federal employee majority in the United States Senate.

Over the next several months, AFGE will carefully examine the voting records and issue positions of leading candidates for the United States Senate – Republican and Democrat – and endorse those who will best protect your interests as government employees. We're also going to connect you with opportunities to volunteer with AFGE and other unions to help elect pro-government employee candidates.

**Remember: failing to fight for your interests today is a vote to have those interests trampled upon tomorrow.**

We need to organize ourselves, hit the phones, pound the pavement, and pull that voting lever on Election Day.

In Solidarity,

### AFGE—THE GOVERNMENT STANDARD

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(from cover)

These attacks are outrageous, unscrupulous and simply untrue. We know that the real problem stems from not having enough front-line doctors, nurses and support staff to provide our veterans with the care they deserve.

But unfortunately, none of that matters to these folks. Our opponents have seized on the VA crisis in the hopes of wiping out the unions at every hospital, clinic, and benefits claim center in the country. And you better believe they won't stop with the VA – their ultimate goal is to get rid of federal employee unions throughout government.

We simply cannot let that happen – not when the lives of our veterans are at stake.

## Our members are the solution, not the problem

If it wasn't for our brave frontline employees and representatives, we wouldn't even know the extent of the problems facing the VA health care system. Our members have been speaking out for years about mismanagement at the VA – and facing serious intimidation and retaliation as a result:



- In May 2014, Local 781 President **Germaine Clarno** appeared on the CBS Evening News to discuss the wait list gaming issue at the Hines VA Medical Center in Chicago.



- In February 2013, Local 2028 President **Kathleen Dahl** testified before the House Committee on Veterans Affairs regarding a deadly outbreak of Legionnaires' disease at the Pittsburgh VA Healthcare System and the subsequent cover-up by management officials.



- In 2011, Local 342 member **Dr. Michelle Washington** testified before the Senate about appointment data manipulation and other problems at the Wilmington VA Medical Center.

“These brave truth tellers should be commended for coming forward and speaking out against the injustice and wrongdoing taking place at their agencies – not being shamed into silence by suggesting that they are part of the problem,” AFGE National President **J. David Cox Sr.** said.

Many of our members are veterans themselves or are the fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters of active duty military. More than anyone, they understand what it means to ensure our veterans are getting the best care, treatment and service possible.

## Contracting out the VA isn't the solution

Pushing more veterans and their family members out of the VA health care system will do nothing to improve their access to timely care – and it could result in veterans getting worse care than what they receive from the VA. Wait times at private-sector medical centers is roughly on par with the wait times being reported at VA facilities.

Even more troubling, patients at private-sector facilities receive lower quality care than patients treated at the VA. According to a 2005 study by the Rand Corporation, VA patients received consistently better care across the board, including screening, diagnosis, treatment and follow-up.

Why would we want to send our veterans to a system where care is inferior and wait times are just as long?

## Staffing is the real issue

The real problem with VA health care is not having enough frontline doctors, nurses and support staff to treat our veterans.

Since 2009, two million veterans entered the VA health care system for a net increase of 1.4 million new patients. Each physician should be responsible for no more than 1,200 patients at a given time, according to the VA's own guidelines, yet many VA doctors are treating upwards of 2,000 patients each.

The VA also has been denied proper funding to build and maintain needed medical facilities, with an estimated \$2 billion funding shortfall for the upcoming fiscal year and another \$500 million shortfall for fiscal 2016. Compounding matters is a performance system that sets unrealistic goals and incentivizes managers to increase the number of patients served, instead of improving the quality of care.

But there is nothing wrong with the VA that can't be healed by what is right with the VA: the frontline providers who care for our veterans every day. Go to [www.afge.org/stafftheva](http://www.afge.org/stafftheva) to find out what you can do to help our veterans get the care they earned.



# STAND UP 2014



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Every race in this election can mean the difference between a government that values government employees, and one that seeks to undermine us at every turn. We have an opportunity to secure a good outcome for government employees, but only if we

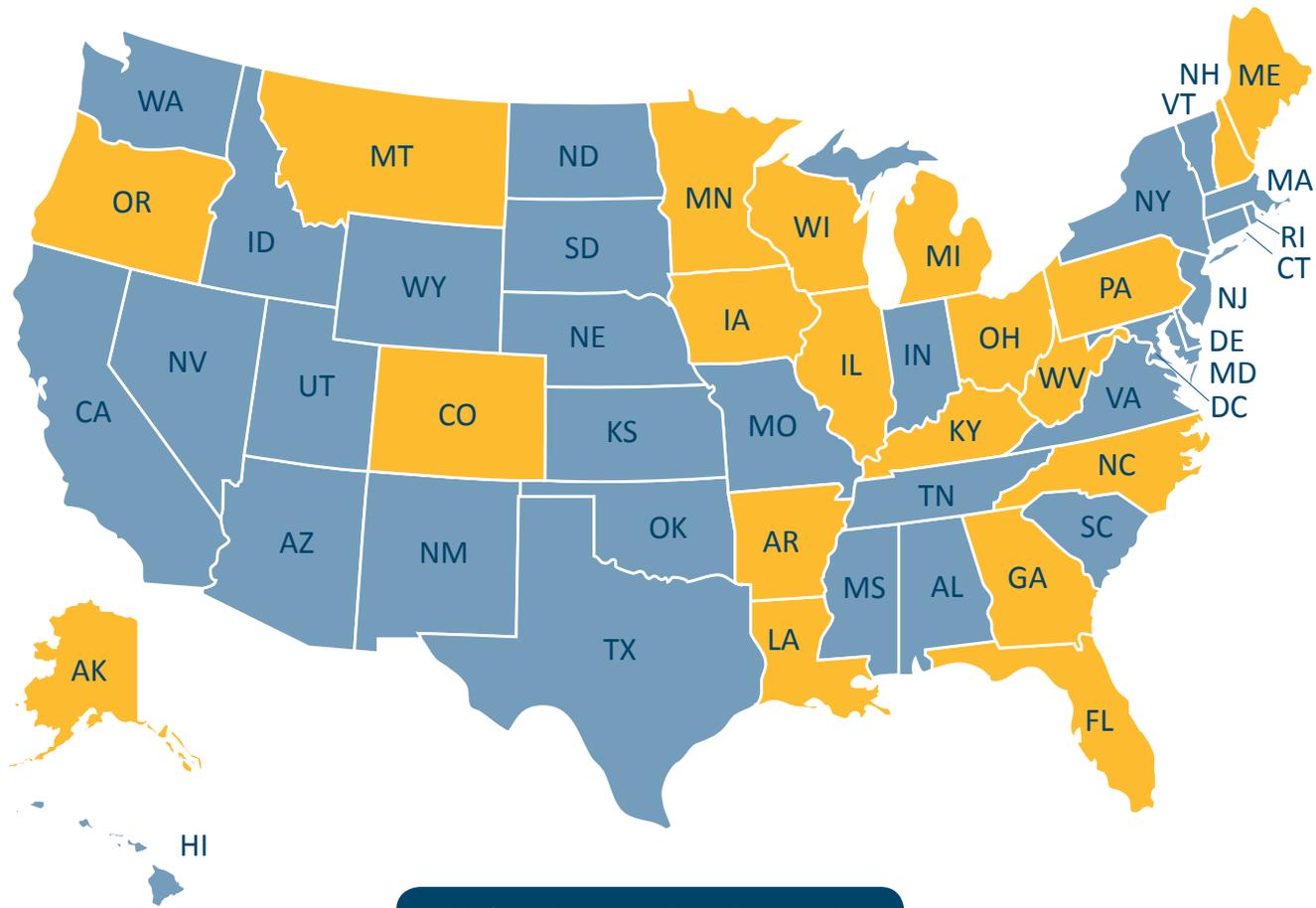
defend the United States Senate, and a few Governors' races. Use the map on page five to see what races AFGE will focus on winning in 2014, and use the questions below to see if candidates in your area stand for government employees or not.



## What to Ask Candidates for Office in My Area

(cut this out and take it to candidate forums)

- Do you oppose further pay freezes, pay cuts, or cuts to health care and other benefits for federal employees?
- Due to the “Sequester,” tens of thousands of federal workers were furloughed and lost pay. Sequestration must be repealed, but no other group of middle-class Americans has sacrificed more for deficit reduction than federal employees. Would you be in favor of ending the Sequester?
- Do you oppose raising federal employees’ pension contributions any higher than they currently are?
- Do you support saving taxpayers money by capping contractor compensation?
- Do you oppose efforts to increase the contracting out of government programs and services?



### AFGE's Priority 2014 Campaigns

**Alaska Senate**

Sen. Mark Begich (D) vs. TBD\*

**Arkansas Senate**

Sen. Mark Pryor (D) vs Rep. Tom Cotton (R)

**Colorado Senate**

Incumbent Mark Udall (D) vs. Rep. Cory Garner (R)

**Florida Governor**

Gov. Rick Scott (R) vs. Charlie Crist (D)

**Georgia Senate & Governor**

Senate: Michelle Nunn (D) vs. TBD\*  
 Governor: Gov. Nathan Deal (R) vs. Jason Carter (D)

**Illinois Governor**

Gov. Pat Quinn (D) vs. Bruce Rauner (R)

**Iowa Senate**

Rep. Bruce Braley (D) vs. Joni Ernst (R)

**Kentucky Senate**

Sen. Mitch McConnell (R) vs. Alison Lundergan Grimes (D)

**Louisiana Senate**

Sen. Mary Landrieu (D) vs TBD\*

**Maine Governor**

Gov. Paul LePage (R) vs. Mike Michaud (D)

**Michigan Senate & Governor**

Senate: Rep. Gary Peters (D) vs. Terri Lynn Land (R)

Governor: Gov. Rick Snyder (R) vs Rep. Mark Schauer (D)

**Montana Senate**

Sen. John Walsh (D) vs. Steve Daines (R)

**Minnesota Senate**

Sen. Al Franken (D) vs. Mike McFadden (R)

**New Hampshire Senate**

Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D) vs. TBD\*

**North Carolina Senate**

Sen. Kay Hagan (D) vs. Thom Tillis (R)

**Ohio Governor**

Gov. John Kasich (R) vs. Ed Fitzgerald (D)

**Oregon Senate**

Sen. Jeff Merkley (D) vs. Monica Wehby (R)

**Pennsylvania Governor**

Gov. Tom Corbett (R) vs Tom Wolf (D)

**Washington DC Mayor**

Muriel Browser (D) vs. David Catania (I)

**West Virginia Senate**

Senate: Natalie Tennant (D) vs Shelley Moore Capito (R)

**Wisconsin Governor**

Gov. Scott Walker (R) vs Mary Burke (D)

\*TBD: As of this printing, candidates have not been determined

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# Tell Congress You Deserve a 3.3% Pay Raise

A small group of lawmakers in the House and Senate is standing up for federal workers and demanding that you receive a fair and meaningful raise for the first time this decade.

The FAIR Act would provide all federal employees with a 3.3 percent pay raise in January, much higher than the 1 percent increase proposed by the Obama administration. The raise would apply equally to both General Schedule employees and hourly workers under the prevailing wage system.

“Federal employees have seen their

standard of living deteriorate due to the three-year pay freeze, unpaid furloughs, and higher retirement contributions for newer workers,” AFGE President **J. David Cox Sr.** said. “This legislation would help our members and all federal employees make up some of that lost ground.”

The legislation faces an uphill climb in Congress, so it’s crucial that employees get involved and encourage their lawmakers to support the legislation.

Below is a list of senators who have not yet signed on to the Senate bill at time of publication.



## See your Senators’ names on this list? Call 202-224-3121 and tell them to sponsor the FAIR Act!

Sen. Mark Begich	AK
Sen. Lisa Murkowski	AK
Sen. Jeff Sessions	AL
Sen. Richard Shelby	AL
Sen. Mark Pryor	AR
Sen. John Boozman	AR
Sen. John McCain	AZ
Sen. Jeff Flake	AZ
Sen. Barbara Boxer	CA
Sen. Dianne Feinstein	CA
Sen. Mark Udall	CO
Sen. Michael Bennet	CO
Sen. Richard Blumenthal	CT
Sen. Christopher Murphy	CT
Sen. Chris Coons	DE
Sen. Thomas Carper	DE
Sen. Bill Nelson	FL
Sen. Marco Rubio	FL
Sen. Saxby Chambliss	GA
Sen. Johnny Isakson	GA
Sen. Mazie Hirono	HI
Sen. Tom Harkin	IA
Sen. Charles Grassley	IA
Sen. Jim Risch	ID
Sen. Michael Crapo	ID
Sen. Richard Durbin	IL
Sen. Mark Kirk	IL
Sen. Joe Donnelly	IN
Sen. Dan Coats	IN
Sen. Pat Roberts	KS
Sen. Jerry Moran	KS
Sen. Mitch McConnell	KY
Sen. Rand Paul	KY

Sen. Mary Landrieu	LA
Sen. David Vitter	LA
Sen. Ed Markey	MA
Sen. Elizabeth Warren	MA
Sen. Barbara Mikulski	MD
Sen. Angus King	ME
Sen. Susan Collins	ME
Sen. Carl Levin	MI
Sen. Debbie Stabenow	MI
Sen. Al Franken	MN
Sen. Amy Klobuchar	MN
Sen. Claire McCaskill	MO
Sen. Roy Blunt	MO
Sen. Thad Cochran	MS
Sen. Roger Wicker	MS
Sen. Max Baucus	MT
Sen. Jon Tester	MT
Sen. Kay Hagan	NC
Sen. Richard Burr	NC
Sen. Heidi Heitkamp	ND
Sen. John Hoeven	ND
Sen. Deb Fischer	NE
Sen. Mike Johanns	NE
Sen. Jeanne Shaheen	NH
Sen. Kelly Ayotte	NH
Sen. Frank Lautenberg	NJ
Sen. Robert Menendez	NJ
Sen. Tom Udall	NM
Sen. Martin Heinrich	NM
Sen. Harry Reid	NV
Sen. Dean Heller	NV
Sen. Charles Schumer	NY
Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand	NY

Sen. Sherrod Brown	OH
Sen. Rob Portman	OH
Sen. James Inhofe	OK
Sen. Tom Coburn	OK
Sen. Jeff Merkley	OR
Sen. Ron Wyden	OR
Sen. Bob Casey	PA
Sen. Patrick Toomey	PA
Sen. Jack Reed	RI
Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse	RI
Sen. Lindsey Graham	SC
Sen. Tim Scott	SC
Sen. Tim Johnson	SD
Sen. John Thune	SD
Sen. Lamar Alexander	TN
Sen. Bob Corker	TN
Sen. John Cornyn	TX
Sen. Ted Cruz	TX
Sen. Mike Lee	UT
Sen. Orrin Hatch	UT
Sen. Mark Warner	VA
Sen. Tim Kaine	VA
Sen. Patrick Leahy	VT
Sen. Bernard Sanders	VT
Sen. Patty Murray	WA
Sen. Maria Cantwell	WA
Sen. Tammy Baldwin	WI
Sen. Ron Johnson	WI
Sen. Joe Manchin	WV
Sen. Jay Rockefeller	WV
Sen. Michael Enzi	WY
Sen. John Barrasso	WY

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## Join the #IAMAFGE Conversation!

**A**re you proud to be a government employee? Spread the word about our “I Am AFGE” campaign and join us in letting America know about the great work AFGE members are doing for our country every single day. Join the conversation and help us have our stories told!

### Here’s How YOU Can Join the Conversation:

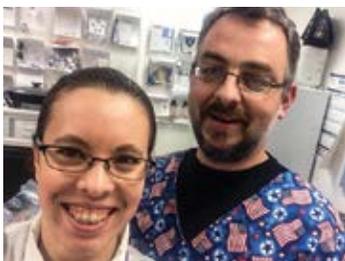
1 Submit a “selfie” photo using your smartphone to

*afgecommsquad@gmail.com* and we’ll share it for the campaign. Please be mindful of your agency’s policy on appearing in uniform outside of work.

2 Hold a watch party with members of your local. A new video is released every three weeks. Go to [www.afge.org/IAM](http://www.afge.org/IAM) to see when the next video drops.

3 Share our videos and other content on social media using the hashtag #IAMAFGE.

To learn more about the campaign, access sharable social media content, or simply view more videos, visit [www.afge.org/iam](http://www.afge.org/iam).



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## AFGE, BOP Sign New Contract



Back (left to right): J. David Cox, Sr., Roger Payne, Eric Young, Eugene Hudson Jr., Michael Meserve, Phil Glover. Front: Michael Rule, Augusta Y. Thomas, Robert Swanson, Sandra Parr, Charles E. Samuels, Jr., Dwayne Person, Clifton Buchanan

NVP **Augusta Y. Thomas**, Chief of Staff **Brian DeWynngaert**, and General Counsel **David Borer**. The signing ceremony also included local presidents and prison wardens from across the country, who joined the signing via webcam.

The BOP and CPL last signed a contract 16 years ago, and concluded negotiations after more than 13 years. The two groups have been working more closely together since the death of two dedicated law enforcement officers this past year. In October, a partnership meeting included a visit with the Attorney General.

“This is a great victory for all of the men and women working in the Bureau,” CPL President **Eric Young** said. “We are proud to have kept all our benefits through the Bush years. We have added new ones including an increased uniform allowance. Our correctional staff are our most valuable resource, and we are happy to see that they will continue to be taken care of with this deal.”

In May, the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) and Council of Prisons Locals (CPL) signed their first new contract in 16 years.

Attendees for the signing ceremony included AFGE National President **J. David Cox Sr.**, National Secretary-Treasurer **Eugene Hudson Jr.**, Women’s and Fair Practices

## Congress Introduces Correctional Officer Pepper Spray Bill

Every day, correctional officers in federal prisons enter their workplace outnumbered. Because of budget cuts, they often have no one else working on their shift with them, forcing these officers to patrol hundreds of prisoners on their own. They are alone and defenseless. This situation is dangerous, and it led to the deaths of three correctional officers in the last two years.

Pennsylvania Sens. Pat Toomey and Bob Casey Jr. are determined to change that. In May, they introduced the Eric Williams Correctional Officer Protection Act of 2014, named for an AFGE member who died in the line of duty in February 2013. The bill would provide BOP officers and staff with pepper spray so they can protect themselves in emergency situations.

## Supreme Court Case May Open Door for Further Union Attacks

The Supreme Court did not deliver the death blow to public sector union service fees that many expected in June’s *Harris v. Quinn* decision, but it may have opened the door to future challenges.

The case involved home health care aides in the State of Illinois who were required to pay services fees for union services since they refused to pay dues. The Court was therefore tasked with deciding whether these workers (and potentially many more across the U.S.) can be compelled to pay their fair share of the cost for representation.

In a 5-4 opinion, the Court found that the collection of service fees from workers who don’t support the union is unconstitutional, but only in the case of the Illinois healthcare workers. The language of the decision could however make it possible to challenge service fees altogether in the future.

“Everyone who benefits from the fruits of collective bargaining should pay their fair share,” said District 14 National Vice President Eric Bunn. “AFGE District 14 stands in solidarity with our public sector union brothers and sisters in the defense of our rights.”

## Koch Brothers Pour \$300 Million into 2014 Election

It's no secret that more and more corporate money has been corrupting our nation's elections in recent years, and it's looking like 2014 could be the worst yet.

**Charles and David Koch**, the billionaire owners of energy giant Koch Industries, have pledged to raise and spend \$300 million from other like-minded conservatives to influence the outcome of this year's mid-term elections. The money will be funneled through a shady network of front groups targeted at attracting key electoral constituencies, with names like Americans for Prosperity, Concerned Veterans of America, Generation Opportunity, and the Libre Initiative. The brothers will also direct the funds to finance attack ads and anti-government political organizers to turn out like-minded voters.

The spending constitutes a major boost to the anti-government, anti-union wing of American politics. If these politicians succeed in taking the Senate from the current pro-government employee majority, government employees will find their pay, benefits, and jobs firmly in the crosshairs.

"Make no mistake about it – these groups are trying to buy America, and we cannot stand for it," said AFGE



National President **J. David Cox Sr.** They may have the fiscal capital, but we have the human capital, and that equals power. If we get active in this election, engage our friends and neighbors, and show up to the voting booth on November 4th, their money won't buy them anything."

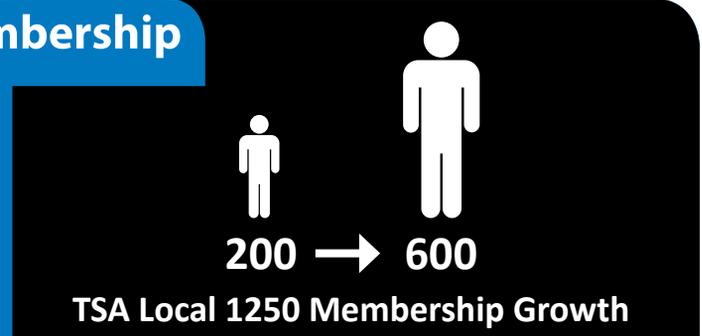
## Phoenix TSA Local Triples Its Membership

**P**hoenix TSA Local 1250 started in July 2013 with a membership of less than 200 people. Today, the local's membership is close to 600—an increase gained in less than six months.

The local's leaders, headed by Local President **Juan Casarez** and assisted by District 12 National Vice President **George McCubbin**, invited national organizers to their airports and held coffee breaks and other events to garner TSO interest.

Casarez, whose local includes nine airports, says face-to-face contact is the most important tool in recruiting new members. "It's very important for the Local executive board to have face time with the TSA officers to make them feel more comfortable speaking to us," Casarez said.

The local's organizing events are simple yet effective. Casarez describes arranging an organizing event as being as easy as choosing a date and informing TSOs, inviting organizers, and setting up a table with flyers. Local 1250 leadership often would convene outside of the airport



to catch people before they left to go home. They would chat about the union, provide quick lessons on what to do and what not to do, and spend time talking about issues.

Casarez believes that in order to be reputable, the stewards need to be well aware of the Collective Bargaining Agreement. His local regularly provides education and classroom training that is open to both shop stewards and non-stewards.

If you are looking for ways to increase your Local membership, visit [www.afge.org](http://www.afge.org) or contact the staff at the national and district offices for assistance.

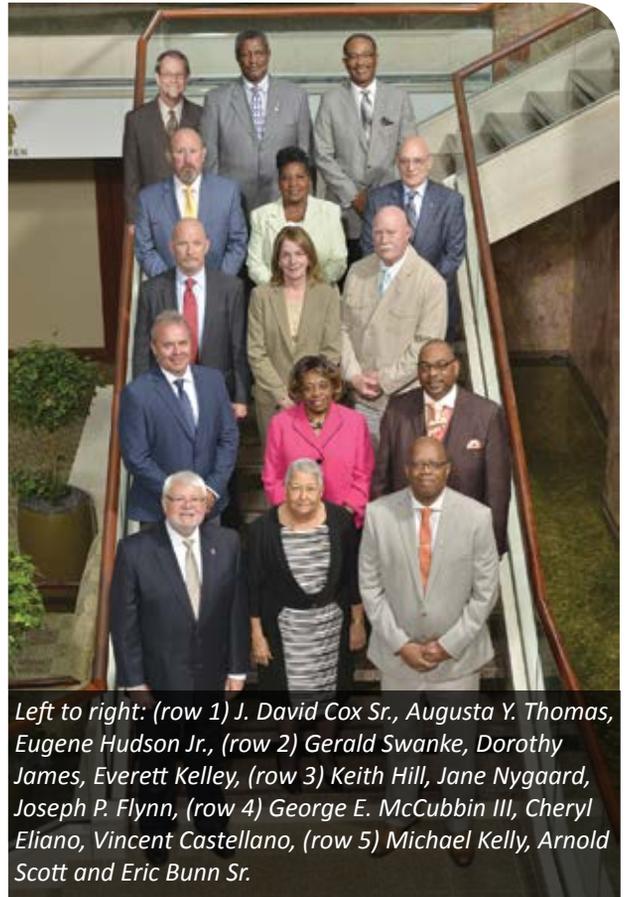
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## AFGE's National Executive Council Welcomes New Members

AFGE's National Executive Council welcomes **Vincent Castellano** and **Cheryl Eliano** as newly elected national vice presidents for District 2 and District 10, respectively. Re-elected were 3rd District NVP **Keith Hill**, 4th District NVP **Joseph P. Flynn**, 5th District NVP **Everett Kelley**, 6th District NVP **Arnold Scott**, 7th District NVP **Dorothy James**, 8th District NVP **Jane Nygaard**, 9th District NVP **Michael Kelly**, 11th District NVP **Gerald Swanke**, 12th District NVP **George E. McCubbin III**, and 14th District NVP **Eric Bunn Sr.** All regional leaders were elected during district caucuses, where union activists participated in trainings and voted on the next leaders for their regions.

"We are pleased to welcome Vincent and Cheryl to our national leadership team," AFGE National President **J. David Cox Sr.** said. "They are proven leaders within our union and we're excited to bring them on board."

NVP Castellano was formerly with AFGE U.S. Air Force Local 1778 and NVP Eliano was the local president at AFGE DoD Local 1920. Congratulations to all of the newly elected and re-elected officers.



Left to right: (row 1) J. David Cox Sr., Augusta Y. Thomas, Eugene Hudson Jr., (row 2) Gerald Swanke, Dorothy James, Everett Kelley, (row 3) Keith Hill, Jane Nygaard, Joseph P. Flynn, (row 4) George E. McCubbin III, Cheryl Eliano, Vincent Castellano, (row 5) Michael Kelly, Arnold Scott and Eric Bunn Sr.

## AFGE Joins Postal Unions, AFL-CIO in Staples Boycott

The U.S. Postal Service is adding more low-wage jobs to the economy by outsourcing work to low-wage employer Staples and replacing USPS workers with Staples workers who average only \$8.50 an hour. The USPS-Staples deal, which established postal counters in more than 80 Staples stores with plans to expand the program to Staples' 1,500 stores, doesn't make any sense also because Staples is closing at least 225 stores by the end of 2015. The closing of postal offices and Staples stores will leave many Americans especially those in the rural areas without access to any nearby post office.

"We also object, in principle, to short-sighted business

arrangements that replace good, living-wage jobs with high-turnover, low-wage jobs as the USPS-Staples deal does," AFGE said in a boycott statement to Staples CEO Ronald Sargent.

America needs more middle-class jobs, not poverty-wage ones. According to a new report from the National Employment Law Project, the bad economy has replaced good jobs with bad ones during the past four years. Low-wage industries like fast food and retail lost two million jobs during the recession but have added 3.8 million ones while higher-wage industries lost 3.6 million positions but have added only 2.6 million.

AFGE also believes that the American people have a right to post offices staffed by highly-trained employees who have taken an oath to safeguard the privacy and security of their mail. AFGE is asking AFGE members, their friends and family members to boycott Staples and take their business elsewhere in protest of this anti-worker deal.

AFGE fully supports the American Postal Workers Union in its fight to protect living-wage jobs and the highest possible standards of customer service.



## AFGE Activists Attend AFL-CIO Young Worker Leadership Institute



From left: Colin Barrett, Crystal Griffin, AFL-CIO Secretary Treasurer Liz Shuler, Suzanne McBride and WFP Program Specialist Caniesha Washington

personally inspired by the stories and experiences of other leaders in the movement. My drive to ensure our efforts are successful has been renewed. I look forward to using these tools to strengthen and grow the AFGE Y.O.U.N.G. organization and I am thankful to have had the opportunity to work among individuals committed to making a difference in the lives of young people.”

—**Suzanne McBride**, AFGE SSA Local 2206



“My experiences at the institute have strengthened my abilities to cultivate an enhanced vision of solidarity that I am ready to share with the next generations. As a

young worker, I believe in the spirit of the labor movement and strive to facilitate employment growth, social responsibility, and forge a union for all workers.”

—**Crystal Griffin**, AFGE DoD Local 1345



The AFL-CIO brought 50 young and motivated union activists together from all over the country to attend a Young Worker Leadership Institute (YWLI) in Dearborn, MI. AFGE activists **Crystal Griffin**, **Colin Barrett**, and **Suzanne McBride** joined young unionists from IBEW, AFSCME, OPEIU, and many AFL-CIO young worker groups for an inspirational and informational week. The YWLI provided participants with a union skill-building opportunity that focused on how to grow and lead policy, organizing, and political campaigns in their communities.

Participants learned program skills such as strategic planning, mentorship and peer coaching, effective communication strategies, political training, common sense economics, and diversity and inclusion training.

“As a representative for AFGE’s 5th District, I was

“I was impressed by the innovative and creative learning exercises, and the wide range of subject matter. The most inspiring part for me was connecting with so many other young union activists from all different parts of the country, backgrounds, and trades, who share the same beliefs and passion for our movement. I left Detroit feeling I was part of something bigger than when I came.”

— **Colin Barrett**, AFGE VA Local 1969



## Social Security Shrinks, Retirement Population Grows

**B**aby Boomers are rapidly entering retirement age and Social Security field offices are feeling the pressure. More than 47 million people receive retirement benefits and 43 million Americans visited field offices in 2013. Common sense dictates that the Social Security Administration is hiring more staff and opening new offices, right?

Wrong. SSA has shuttered 73 field offices, eliminated 11,000 employees and plans only to interact with the public online. SSA’s “Vision 2025” plan ignores that many older Americans lack internet access or aren’t comfortable using it to apply for the benefits.

“People simply want and need to discuss the complex

issues that surround this program with someone who has the training and expertise to help,” says AFGE Council 220 President **Witold Skwierczynski**.

Social Security Number Printouts and Benefit Verification Forms, documents used for mortgage applications, car loans and for other government programs, won’t be offered at field offices after Aug. 1 and Oct. 1, respectively. Online processing and delivery will take at least seven days – a long time for someone who needs that information for a new job.

AFGE thinks seniors and future generations deserve a range of customer service options. Take Action at [www.AFGE.org/SaveOurSocialSecurity](http://www.AFGE.org/SaveOurSocialSecurity).

**AFGE**



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# Education Benefits

**Union membership** provides a way for working families to increase their opportunities and economic security. That’s why **Union Plus** is committed to helping union members and their families fund their college education. Now we have new programs to help you pay down your **student loan debt**.



## **NEW \$500 Student Debt Eraser**

Grants to help Union Plus Credit Card, Mortgage and Insurance participants pay off their student loans. **Apply Now!** Grants are only available for as long as funds last.

## **NEW \$20K Student Loan Giveaway**

**June 1 to August 15** – enter to win up to \$10,000 to pay off your student loans. We’ll put a major dent in the student loan debt of three lucky winners. Plus, more prizes, such as courses, consultations and books provided by The Princeton Review!

### **Other Union plus Education Benefits**

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- College Test Prep Discounts
- Textbook Discounts
- Free Student Loan Counseling
- Union Plus Scholarship
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