



300,000

AFGE Membership Shatters 300K Barrier

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

If you've attended an AFGE event over the past few years, odds are you've heard me say this at least once: organize, represent, mobilize!

These words are more than just a figure of speech; they are a battle cry for every member of AFGE to do their part to protect their families' livelihoods.

It's critical to understand that all of us are living in extraordinary times. Over the past five years, a radical faction of lawmakers has taken over the reins of power in Washington and frozen your pay, robbed billions from your retirement, and overseen huge increases in your share of health insurance premiums.

Their mission is to turn the federal government into Wal-Mart, where workers are underpaid, overworked, and mostly importantly, unable to form and join a union. They don't want to just take your money; they want to take away your basic right to come together with your coworkers and do something about it.

And with details of a new budget agreement being decided now, these lawmakers have the perfect opportunity to deliver the final blow.

Unless Congress eliminates sequester cuts for good, federal agencies will see \$1 trillion in cuts to their budgets over the next decade – that means massive furloughs, fewer jobs, and less resources to serve the public.

Sisters and brothers, this threat is as serious as it gets. The time to organize new members, represent our people, and mobilize them to act is right now. Not tomorrow or next year, but today.

Employees cannot withstand another hit to their take-home pay after years of cutbacks, and you are the only one who can stop that from happening. Don't fall for the illusion that there's nothing we can do to stop it.

There was a time not too long ago when federal employees could rely on a decent retirement, 3-4% annual pay increases, and affordable health insurance. Agency funding was always a struggle, but employees weren't treated as Congress' political scapegoat.

We can become big enough to win a better future for our families, but we all need to do our part. Being a member of AFGE is more than just paying your dues every month – it's about having your sister's back when she needs you.

Staying silent and waiting for superman is not a strategy – it's surrender.

So go to www.afge.org today and get involved in the movement to protect government employees' livelihoods. If you don't, who will?

In Solidarity,

AFGE—THE GOVERNMENT STANDARD

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Pay & Benefits Spotlight: What's in your Wallet?



These Lawmakers Want You to Get Paid in the Event of a Shutdown

Reps. Don Beyer and Rob Wittman are sending a dear colleague letter to their coworkers asking them to cosponsor a bill that would make sure federal employees get paid immediately after the government re-opens in the event of a shutdown.

Their bill, the Federal Employee Retroactive Pay Fairness Act, ensures that all federal employees receive retroactive pay for the duration of any shutdown, regardless of furlough status. Sen. Ben Cardin of Maryland has introduced a similar bill, the 2015 Federal Employee Fair Treatment Act.

In the 2013 shutdown that lasted 16 days, federal employees didn't get paid until Oct. 25, even though the government re-opened on Oct. 17. They had to wait until lawmakers struck the final deal to fund agencies. Tell Congress to support the Federal Employee Retroactive Pay Fairness Act.

Bill Supports Pay Locality Equity for Blue-collar and White-collar Workers

Blue- and white-collar workers at Tobyhanna Army Depot and location like it across the country soon would receive the same local pay rates thanks to Rep. Matt Cartwright, who recently introduced H.R. 2450, the Locality Pay Equity Act. AFGE thanks him and congratulates other original cosponsors to the legislation: Tom Marino, Bob Brady, Chaka Fattah and Allison Schwartz, all of Pennsylvania.

In numerous locations, the government treats hourly and salary workers who work in the same location as if they worked in different locations when it comes to calculating local pay rates. White-collar locality boundaries are drawn to encompass metropolitan labor markets, as defined by census data on commuting rates. Blue-collar locality boundaries are drawn according to the placement of military installations in the 1950s, long before federal white-collar workers were paid local differentials.

Health Insurance Premium Rise of 7.4 % Cuts Into Take-Home Pay

Enrollees in the Federal Employees Health Benefit Program will pay 7.4% more on average for their insurance premiums starting in January, while the government's share of premiums will increase 6% on average, the Office of Personnel Management announced in late September.

Biweekly premiums will increase \$5.50 for enrollees who select the self-only plan, \$8.92 for enrollees who select the new self-plus-one plan, and \$19.61 for enrollees who select the family plan.

Overall, average premiums for non-postal employees and retirees will increase 6.4% in 2016, which is double last year's increase and the highest increase in six years. The source of the premium increase was not adequately identified by OPM during a briefing with unions, although OPM attributed some of the cost increase to prescription drugs. Premiums also are increasing an average of 2.23% for dental plans and 3.61% for vision coverage, OPM said.



Breaking the Barrier: AFGE Makes History by Reaching 300,000 Members

After decades of strategic planning and hard work, the day has finally come. On October 26th, 2015, AFGE's membership hit a record-high 300,000 members – a historic milestone that caps 24 consecutive years of membership growth. This is a one of the most remarkable achievements in our union's more than 80 years of existence, especially in light of the continued threats to labor unions.

AFGE thanks our members for helping make it happen. Please join the celebration with our 300,000 Celebration Toolkit at www.afge.org/300kstrong.

So how did we reach the 300,000 mark? As it turns out, the most effective recruiting tool AFGE has is not our technology, but our people: members talking to their coworkers about the importance of



“To get people interested, you have a Lunch and Learn or informational event on the hot-button issues. I look at what we are writing grievances on and organize around that. I also make some events members only. It seems to drive non-members crazy and they join. My two biggest events were for members only and between both events I had about 190 people join.”

Muriel Newman

working together as one. AFGE, and the entire labor movement for that matter, depend on every one of us playing this simple but vital role to grow and prosper.

Let's put it this way: If every AFGE member asks at least one of their co-workers to join, AFGE will double our membership overnight. That's the power of one-on-one conversations and communications. It's been proven time and again that a simple ask does the trick. Our members have been telling us for years that they joined simply because we asked them to.

"There is no replacement for a good face-to-face conversation. Not emails. Not flyers. Not social media," said AFGE Membership and Organization Director Bill Lyons. "AFGE has been growing the past 24 years because we engage potential members face to face."

For federal employees, joining the union is completely voluntary. AFGE collects dues only from employees who choose to join the union – even though the union must represent all employees in a bargaining unit whether or not they are active union members. Everyone who is a member of AFGE joins because they want to be part of something bigger than themselves.

The best advice on organizing I've ever received is that there are no non-members. There are only members and potential members.

We also have to remember that all individuals have different reasons to join. We have to find that reason and be able to inform that potential member of all the benefits available.

Mollie Tolbert

"Being a union member means looking out for everyone in the workplace, not just your own self-interests. It's about lifting up those individuals whose voices are otherwise silenced," AFGE President J. David Cox Sr. said. "It's about joining together in solidarity to fight for better working conditions not just in your own workplace but in workplaces across the country and around the world."

**Ask a co-worker to join us today:
www.afge.org/Join.**

The Journey from 200,000 to 300,000 (2002-2015)



* As of October 2015

Two-Year Budget Deal Spares Federal Employees from Pay Cuts



AFGE members and supporters stand together at an October sequestration rally on Capitol Hill.

In late October, Congress and the White House announced a two-year budget agreement that suspends the automatic cuts required under sequestration and provides much-needed increases in military and domestic spending.

Most importantly, the agreement raises spending caps without imposing additional financial hardships on federal employees, who have endured \$159 billion in cuts under the guise of fiscal restraint. AFGE members were united in opposing any budget that would target federal employees for additional

sacrifice, and it's clear that Congress finally got the message.

"All of our phone calls, emails, and rallies really paid off. Congress got the message loud and clear that they couldn't pick on federal employees anymore."

AFGE National President J. David Cox Sr.

The budget agreement also eliminated a massive increase in Medicare Part B premiums for federal retirees under the Civil Service Retirement System.

The budget deal suspends sequestration for the next two years, avoiding the potential for government shutdowns or unpaid furloughs that have loomed large for the past few years.

The High Cost of Low Budgets

Now that the immediate threat has receded, the next challenge will be for Congress to repeal sequestration permanently and stop the destructive cycle of manufactured budget crises. Unless sequestration is repealed for good, future budget cuts will take their toll on federal programs and services – and, in turn, on communities across the country that depend on good federal jobs to keep the economy moving.

A new AFGE video illustrates the impact of recent budget cuts on one such community located near the U.S.-Mexico border in Sierra Vista, Ariz. The neighboring Fort Huachuca Army base has lost 1,100 civilian positions during the past 18 months due to budget cuts and was facing the prospect of losing another 30% of civilian jobs under sequestration. Watch the video at: www.afge.org/DefendOurJobs



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Defense Targets Employee Jobs, Pay, Rights for Deep Cuts



Small towns surrounding military bases like Sierra Vista, AZ, have been devastated by deep cuts to troop and civilian workforce levels.

The Department of Defense is pursuing policies that would result in jobs cuts, lost wages, and fewer rights for many of the Department of Defense's (DoD) nearly 750,000 civilian employees, and we your need to help to stop it.

Tens of Thousands of Defense Jobs are on the Line

The Pentagon is preparing to make BRAC-type cuts to military personnel – which would result in a decrease of DoD civilian jobs – and also slash headquarters funding and staffing by 25% through fiscal 2020.

Under the DoD's plan, the Army would be slashed to levels not seen since before World War II. These cuts would devastate communities that rely on military bases for economic support and decimate our military readiness.

DoD also is considering slashing the pay and benefits of civilian employees who work in military commissaries by converting them from traditional civil service status to non-appropriated fund status. This downgrade would impose significant pay cuts, anywhere from 10% to 50% depending on job and location. In addition, employees would see

their current health insurance, retirement, and workers' compensation benefits disappear, only to be replaced by substandard offerings.

Force of the Future and Your Rights

One particularly alarming proposal, first presented to AFGE and other unions in late August, would give virtually unlimited power to DoD managers to hire, fire, discipline, set pay, determine tenure, and dictate many other terms of employment.

Many of the pay and performance management provisions contained

in the Pentagon's plan, dubbed Force of the Future, are regurgitated from the George W. Bush administration's failed National Security Personnel System, which was pushed through Congress in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks. That deeply unpopular system was moth-balled just a few years later after it was found to be discriminatory toward women and people of color.

Under the initial proposal, civilian employees would be transferred from Title 5 of the U.S. Code, which provides ample workplace rights for the bulk of federal civil service employees, to Title 10, which primarily covers the military and offers much weaker protection to civilians. This would essentially make every employee a temporary employee without protections from bad managers and politics.

Though AFGE has been assured that this piece of the plan is now off the table, thanks to our vigorous objections, we are keeping the pressure on DoD and carefully reviewing other pieces of the Force of the Future plan.

DEFEND YOUR JOB
www.afge.org/DefendOurJobs

Presidential Candidates Speak Out on Your Pay and Benefits



One thing is certain: the next resident of the White House will have a huge impact on how government employees are treated. AFGE members deserve to know where the candidates stand on issues of pay, benefits, retirement, government funding levels, and the future of the labor movement.

That's why AFGE reached out to every single announced candidate and asked for their opinion on issues that matter to the hard-working government employees in our union. Out of all the candidates, we only received two responses – from former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Senator Bernie Sanders. Here's a snapshot of what they said:

WHO RESPONDED TO AFGE'S QUESTIONNAIRE?

THEY DID: Hillary Clinton & Bernie Sanders

THEY DIDN'T: Jim Gilmore, George Pataki, Jeb Bush, Lindsey Graham, Rand Paul, Ben Carson, Bobby Jindal, Marco Rubio, Chris Christie, John Kasich, Rick Santorum, Ted Cruz, Martin O'Malley, Donald Trump

Q. If elected, would you oppose further pay freezes or retirement cuts, or cuts to other benefits?

Clinton: I will oppose across-the-board arbitrary pay freezes, retirement cuts, or cuts to other employee benefits. I also believe in the importance of meeting our commitments to retired federal employees.

Sanders: Yes. For far too long, the extreme right wing has demonized, belittled, and sought to

destroy the federal workforce. That is wrong, that is unconscionable, and that has got to change.

Q. Would you work to end sequestration without imposing further cuts to federal employees' pay and benefits?

Clinton: We need to compensate federal employees fairly for the work that they do for our nation rather than pursuing misguided, across-the-board cuts that hurt federal employee morale and make it harder for the federal government to recruit and keep the employees we need in our nation's service.

Sanders: Yes. I was one of only six senators in the Democratic caucus who voted against sequestration because I thought it was terribly wrong to reduce the deficit on the backs of the federal workforce, the elderly, the sick, and working families.

Q. If elected, will you insist that Congress agree to pay furloughed federal workers in any future shutdown?

Clinton: I would work to avoid any government shutdowns...In the event of any future shutdown, however, I would insist that Congress agree to pay furloughed federal workers so that they can make ends meet while they are on furlough.

Sanders: Yes. When the Republicans shut down the federal government in 2013, it was outrageous that 750,000 furloughed federal employees lost a combined \$1 billion in pay. Many of these workers are working paycheck to paycheck. Federal workers should not be asked to sacrifice their pay and benefits because of a dysfunctional Congress.

Watch Clinton and Sanders' video messages to AFGE members and read their full questionnaire responses at www.afge.org/candidates.

Q. If elected, would you oppose efforts to repeal the prohibitions against the A-76 privatization process until those problems have been fixed? Similarly, would you support efforts to enforce prohibitions against contracting out work last performed by federal employees?

Clinton: I would support keeping in place the government-wide prohibitions against further A-76 privatizations until the federal government has developed and implemented a process to fully evaluate proposals to privatize federal work. I would oppose efforts to contract out work unless doing so is actually in the best interest of the U.S. government and is clearly cost-effective.

Sanders: I have strongly opposed the efforts of the George W. Bush Administration to privatize or contract-out government employees through a revision it made to OMB Circular A-76 in 2003. If the billions of dollars in no-bid contracts the Bush Administration provided to Halliburton, Blackwater, and other private contractors in Iraq taught us anything, it is that we should not be injecting the profit motive into the national security of this country. These privatization schemes are not only bad for federal employees, they ultimately lead to poorer services that the public depends on, and in many cases, could have a disastrous effect on national security.

Q. If elected, would you oppose efforts to manage federal employees by arbitrary caps, freezes, cuts, and other constraints, and instead support the management of federal employees by budgets and workloads?

Clinton: I would direct agencies to choose the most effective way to accomplish government work, rather than setting arbitrary caps on the number of federal employees.



Sanders: I believe that in many instances, federal workers are better trained, equipped, and experienced than private contractors. If elected, I would work with AFGE to ensure that the most qualified, experienced, and well-trained workers receive these jobs.

Q. If elected, are you committed to fully funding Social Security operations?

Clinton: We need to keep defending the Social Security Administration from cuts and attacks so that Social Security can deliver effectively on the promises made to America's seniors. In addition to investing in the vital employees who make Social Security run, we also need to invest in new technologies to reduce workload and make sure that employees are able to spend time on tasks that require their unique skills, rather than functions that can be streamlined or automated with no impact on Social Security beneficiaries.

Sanders: I will work to expand, not cut, the SSA budget so that Americans are able to get their Social Security benefits processed on time and without delay. I would also work with the AFGE on a plan to significantly reduce the backlog in disability benefits.

*Mark your
Calendar!*



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Transitioning Toward Change



AFGE Local 1858 activist Tamara Lusardi at the Capitol Pride Parade in D.C.

Over the past 40 years, social attitudes about gender have changed. As a result of increased understanding regarding gender identity, U.S. lawmakers and courts have begun to recognize and enforce legal protections for transgender individuals.

“In 2010 I transitioned from Todd to Tamara,” said AFGE Local 1858 activist Tamara Lusardi. “I continued to work but made several people uncomfortable. Eventually, I was given less duties, and less responsibilities. I filed a complaint

with the help of AFGE and the Transgender Law Center that the Office of Special Council and Equal Opportunity Employment Commission found in my favor.”

At least 18 states have passed laws that protect transgender individuals from employment discrimination based on their gender identity or gender expression. There are also over 140 municipalities that have laws prohibiting employment discrimination based on gender identity.

“We’re sending a message that says we want to be judged on how we do our work, and not on things that do not affect our work performance,” said Lusardi. [The ruling] allows me to be my true self.”

As courts and lawmakers begin to understand that being transgender is a part of one’s gender/gender identity/gender expression, the legal protections for such individuals will continue to expand.

Read more at the Women’s and Fair Practices website, www.afge.org/WFP.

Concerns Mount With Push for Private Ambulances in D.C.



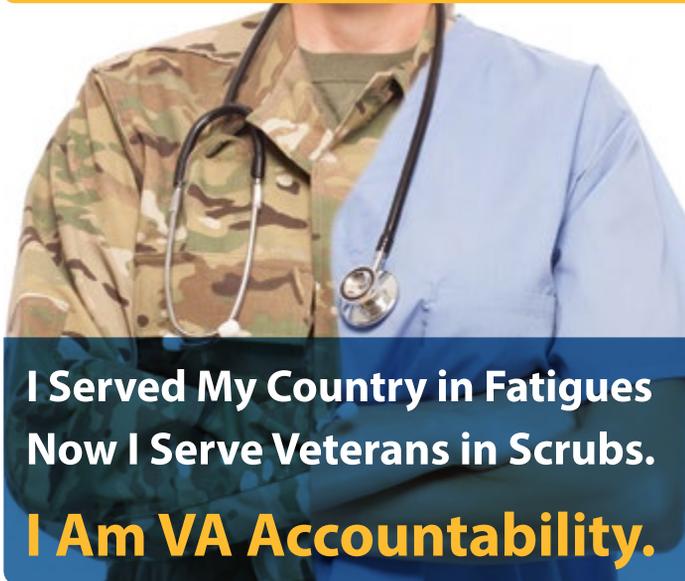
AFGE Local 3721 is working diligently to combat plans to privatize parts of D.C.’s EMS system. After a rushed D.C. Council meeting,

council members voted unanimously to approve a plan that relies on third-party vendors to respond to emergency medical calls in the District.

“The quick passage of this plan is dangerous to the emergency care provided by EMS to District residents and visitors,” said AFGE Local 3721 President Aretha Lyles. “This Band-Aid approach to a systemic problem will only send us back where we started.”

Local 3721 offered the City Council recommendations to get the program back on track: center resources and funding on medical care; increase city civilian EMS over private companies; and convene talks with trained civilian EMS in order to improve the system.

Whistleblowers, Veterans Speak Out to Protect VA Workers' Rights



**I Served My Country in Fatigues
Now I Serve Veterans in Scrubs.
I Am VA Accountability.**

VA employees at veterans, hospitals/clinics, benefits offices, and cemeteries across America soon could be fired at the drop of a hat thanks to new legislation pending in the U.S. Senate.

The so-called VA Accountability Act (S. 1082) is being pushed by a small group of extremist lawmakers and the Koch Brothers-funded front group, Concerned Veterans for America. Their goal is to make every VA employee at-will, with no meaningful appeal rights. This leaves whistleblowers who expose threats to veterans' care in imminent danger of being fired by bad managers looking to sweep their failures under the rug.

But a group of AFGE whistleblowers and veterans has come forward to call for real VA accountability and defend the rights of honest VA employees.

Collectively they've impacted the lives of tens of thousands of veterans by exposing waitlist gaming, a Legionnaires' disease outbreak, and rampant mismanagement. Now, they're ready to expose the misleading VA Accountability Act.

"As a peer it is my responsibility to hold my coworkers accountable, and I do every day. We don't need legislation to blunt the input of frontline workers - we need to empower them. This legislation [S. 1082] is only stealing away the little rights employees have."

***Kathi Dahl, registered nurse at
Pittsburgh VA Medical Center***

Fortunately, there is a better way to hold bad actors accountable without discouraging whistleblowers from coming forward. The Department of Veterans Affairs Equitable Employee Accountability Act of 2015 (S. 1856), introduced by Sen. Richard Blumenthal, would strengthen whistleblower protections, improve management performance, secure the safety of veterans and employees, and increase oversight of VA health care through regular reporting to Congress. Read their stories by visiting www.afge.org/VADueProcess.

**Call 855-976-5397
and tell your lawmaker:
Protect Due Process Rights**

Wounded Warriors Are Now One Step Closer to Accessing Treatment

No veterans should have to choose between their medical appointments and a paycheck. Now, they won't have to, thanks to the recent passage of the Wounded Warriors Federal Leave Act in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Service-connected disabled veterans now will have immediate access to their full year's sick leave (104 hours) during their first year of federal employment

so they can access medical treatment for injuries resulting from their military service.

The House passed the bill on Sept. 28, and the Senate passed the House version on Oct. 26, sending it to President Obama for his signature.

AFGE thanks Sen. Jon Tester of Montana for shepherding the bill through the Senate.



**AMERICAN FEDERATION OF
GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO**

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