



# 2022 AFGE LABOR COMMUNICATIONS

*The Winners Circle*

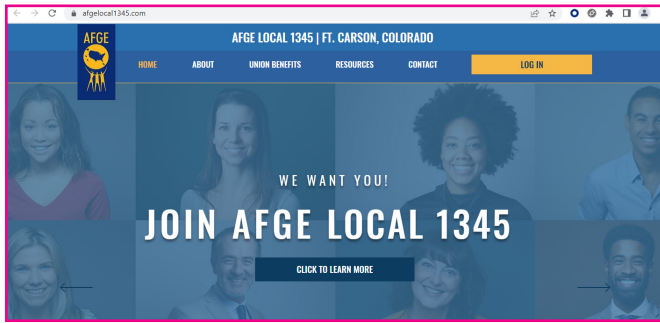


The 2022 AFGE Labor Communications Awards featured the highest level of participation from AFGE affiliates to date! Our esteemed panel of judges reviewed 110 entries from 34 AFGE affiliates and the competition was tough. This year we refreshed the contest format, added new categories, and honored activists and communicators who are moving AFGE's labor communications program forward.

# HERE ARE OUR WINNERS!

## Best Website

AFGE Local 1345 | [www.afgelocal1345.com](http://www.afgelocal1345.com)



## Best Single Issue Publication/ Collateral (Locals)

AFGE Local 1052 | Membership Appreciation Flyer



## Best Photography, Original Cartoon, Graphic

AFGE Local 1661 | Billboard Calling Out Understaffing



## Best Print Publication (Locals)

AFGE Local 1117 | September 2021 Newsletter

## Best News Interview/Media Mention

AFGE Local 1985 for their mention in the Washington Post article, *Most VA workers see racism against colleagues and veterans, union survey finds*



AFGE Local 3403 for their mention in the Government Executive article, *Science Foundation Director Faces Employee Backlash Over Reentry Announcement*



Special thanks to our contest judges: ILCA President Chelsea Connor, ILCA Treasurer DeLane Adams, Journalist Bob Hennelly, AFGE District 14 National Vice President Ottis Johnson Jr., AFGE Field Mobilization Director Amy Lloyd, AFGE Political Director Kevin Cooper, AFGE Communications Director Andrew Huddleston, AFGE Deputy Communications Director Brittany Holder, AFGE Organizing Director Dave Cann, AFGE Supervisory National Organizer Sandy Weaver, AFGE Graphic Specialists Rodrigo Alvarez and Janelle Murphy, AFGE Communications Department Secretary to the Director Brianna Anderson, and AFGE Communications Specialists Tim Kauffman, Tichakorn Hill, Sydney Glass-Harley, Dan Riehl, and Chelsea Bland.



### Best Photo Collage

**AFGE Council 216 | 2020 Legislative Conference Photo Collage**

### Best Issues/Advocacy, Education/Training, Promotional Video

**AFGE Local 2328 for their video, Fed Up? Rise Up!**



**POINT/COUNTERPOINT ON VACCINATION MANDATE**

Since becoming an active union leader nearly six years ago, I have never encountered a subject so compelling for members of our bargaining unit as the recent White House COVID-19 vaccine mandate. From the moment it was announced, texts, instant messages, emails, and phone calls have poured into AFGE Local 2369. Employees, on both sides of the issue, are extremely passionate about their position on vaccination and the mandate.

One group of employees believe that they are doing the right thing protecting themselves, their families, their fellow Americans, and co-workers. They feel that getting vaccinated is an act of compassion and even an act of patriotism. They enthusiastically defend the mandate and believe the White House made the right call.

On the other end of the spectrum, there are many employees who believe that the decision to vaccinate should be a personal decision made between themselves and their doctor or religious leader. This is the group I would like to discuss further.

Employees with legitimate medical conditions have been advised by their doctor that the vaccine may not be right for them at this time. Pregnant women have voiced concerns about getting vaccinated. Some of these women do not have an objection to being vaccinated but want to wait until giving birth. Others fear that because of previous COVID-19 infection, they have the same immunity as the vaccine would provide. Also, there are those with sincere, held beliefs, whether religious or otherwise, who have strong convictions against vaccination and the mandate.

There are those who do not believe that the government or their employer have the right to mandate what each one they put into their bodies. Many in this group believe that it is a very patriotic way to keep their fellow Americans, and therefore to stand and not allow government and employers to dictate to them important medical decisions.

Some may believe that these employees come from a "misinformed" or "brain-washed" segment of our society associated with a certain demographic or political affiliation. To the contrary, the employees contacting the union come from every demographic, group of color, white, suburban, urban, all religious beliefs, all political affiliations, and everything in between.

These individuals have requested medical or religious exemptions and we are now seeing approvals for medical exemptions. As of this writing we have heard nothing on religious exemptions. We recommend that you fit into a category that could qualify for an exemption, and have not already done so, please submit your exemption to us immediately. There is a process that must be followed, and it will be difficult to help you if the proper procedure is not followed.

As a Union, we deal with conditions of employment. We have heard from many that this vaccination mandate is the "ultimate" condition of employment. "No vaccine, no job?"

Regardless of our personal feelings, as a Union, it is our obligation to protect the rights of all bargaining unit employees. We strongly believe that if an employee does not have a medical or sincerely held religious objection to vaccination that they get vaccinated. On the other hand, we have encouraged any legitimate objections and concerns that may prohibit a person from vaccination either now or in the future. Fully understand that the Union will do everything within the confines of our National Agreement and statute to ensure our bargaining unit employees rights are protected. This vaccination mandate will surely be challenged in the courts, and we do not know what the outcome will be. AFGE 2369 truly has the best interests of all of our bargaining unit employees in mind and will fight our battles to the very end.

Given that some employees have very legitimate medical situations or sincerely held religious beliefs, on vaccination, we would request nothing less of our bargaining unit employees that to not engage us or that those employees who do differently, you respect know where someone is in life or what medical or other life situation they may be facing.

Together we are strong!

*Michael Iskander*

### Best News Story

**AFGE Local 2369 | Point/Counterpoint on Vaccine Mandate**

### Best Feature Story

**AFGE Council 216 | Skyrocketing Productivity Shattered My Telework Concerns**

#### Skyrocketing Productivity Shattered My Telework Concerns

unspecified period was scary and new, I quickly found out telework was manageable. Besides, COVID-19 was just a virus and it would end soon. (Insert laugh track here!)

One year later, I am thriving in the telework environment, ironically, because office distractions have been eliminated. I did not realize all the noise that was going on at work, even in a local office of nine employees, and one non-stop copy machine outside my door was gone. The earplugs I once depended upon so much now remain unused in a desk drawer.

A few things come to mind that are not missed. At home, I can sleep two extra hours. No more rushing out the

working from home. Instead of rushing to get charging parties to sign a Form 5, we simply send the charge language electronically. The best part is that I can use the complete two hours of appointment time to find out what is going on. In the office, we were rushed to finish the appointment or to use the restroom before the next appointment. (Intake MOI of fifteen minutes between intake appointments? Insert your laugh track here!) The cherry on top of "Intake by Home" includes turning off my microphone to slay some coffee, as all food and drink (except water) is banned from Intake interview rooms in our office.

Being thrown into telework has been a welcome challenge that I thrive on daily. It is quite funny to realize the

**By Shanna Mehta, Investigator, Local 3230, San Diego Local Office**  
Telework was something I always shunned and never had serious thoughts about. The fear of productivity drop-off because of the distractions of home was the major reason. Add televi-

### Best Placed Letter To The Editor/Op-Ed

**AFGE Local 2328 for their op-ed, VA workers are the US health care system's fail-safe. Why isn't the VA listening to them?, placed in Federal News Network**

#### VA workers are the US health care system's fail-safe. Why isn't the VA listening to them?

Shawn Shorter  
September 21, 2020 9:17 am 2 min read

Veterans Affairs workers like myself have a solemn duty to serve and protect veterans — men and women who have sacrificed for our nation. Another important if lesser known responsibility we have is part of the VA's "Fourth Mission", which is to improve the country's preparedness for national emergencies.

In March and April, when hospitals in New York were overwhelmed with COVID-19 patients, VA workers stepped up to help. Now, as more states around the country see an increase in new cases and hospitalizations, VA workers — a third of whom are veterans themselves — are once again being called upon to provide critical support to bolster strained public hospital systems.

Yet many VA workers are concerned that VA officials in Washington, D.C. won't do what is necessary to ensure we can do our jobs and keep veterans safe. That's because the response to the pandemic from VA Secretary Robert Wilkie and the Department of Veterans Affairs has been an unmitigated disaster.

At the start of the pandemic, VA facilities across the country faced severe shortages of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). VA officials have downplayed the risks that front-line workers have to deal with in order to avoid paying hazard pay and workers compensation when nurses get COVID-19 on the job. They've also neglected to standardize policies around telework and leave, leading to unsafe conditions and a patchwork of policies that put VA workers and veterans at risk.

Meanwhile, when VA workers speak out about these issues, the response from Secretary Wilkie and the Trump administration has fallen on deaf ears. When workers raised the alarm about PPE shortages, officials publicly denied the shortages existed and only acknowledged them once internal memos were leaked to the press. More recently, when a VA nurse from Michigan who contracted COVID-19 on the job spoke out about the VA's mishandling of the crisis and the need for a better union contract for VA workers, Secretary Wilkie published an op-ed dismissing her and attacking the union that represents over 270,000 VA workers nationwide.

Despite the ongoing issues facing VA facilities across the country, VA workers continue to step up and care for veterans. Meanwhile, over 2,300 VA patients have died of COVID-19 and 50,000 have tested positive. Over 4,500 VA employees have also tested positive and 54 have died from the virus.

At the VA facility in Hampton, Virginia where I work, we've had 75 positive cases among staff. It took me two months to get approval for telework. I've had multiple coworkers call me in tears not knowing what to do. Local management and VA leadership haven't listened when we speak up about the issues we're facing, so we've had to resort to contacting our congresspeople and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) instead.

## This year we also introduced three special awards to recognize AFGE labor communicators who are making a difference!

### Members' Choice Award

Presented to AFGE Local 2369 via selection by AFGE members for their photo collage of members wearing shorts to highlight short staffing at SSA.

### Communicator In Action Award

Presented to AFGE Local 3272 President Amber Anderson-Westbrook for using communication tools to mobilize AFGE leaders and activists around critical issues.

### Breakout Communicator Award

Presented to AFGE District 3 Office Manager Kimberly Krainak-Lambert for outstanding work in overall labor communications to educate and mobilize AFGE leaders and activists.

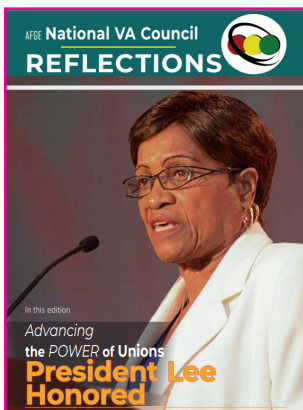
# Our most prestigious AFGE Labor Communications Award is the Clyde M. Webber



Established in 1980, the Clyde M. Webber Award honors excellence in serving AFGE members through journalism. The criteria for this award can be based on the overall distinction of one issue, a single article, a cartoon, or any other outstanding feature or combination of features that the judges believe sets one local, council, or district apart from all the others. This year's winner has shown outstanding growth and overall excellence when it comes to labor communications.

## CONGRATULATIONS AFGE NATIONAL VA COUNCIL 53!

They are also the recipient of four other awards in this year's contest including:



**Best Print Publication  
(Councils/Caucuses/  
Districts)**



**Best Use Of Social Media**



**Best Single Issue  
Publication (Councils/  
Caucuses/Districts)**

**Best Photograph, Original Cartoon, Graphic**

