

Hoosier Happenings

We're Faced With Challenges

But what are you going to do about it? By Amad Ali

January 2014

Social Security employees should stop referring to management as their bosses. This is a necessary attitude that makes for a more efficient, responsible and respectful relationship between employees and management. Not only that, it makes our Union more credible and strong.

Many employees, including myself, often-times begin jobs with the assumption that there is a "boss", "head honcho", the arbiter, and the determiner of everything that goes on within a given office or business. Such an assumption has been ingrained in most Americans. Although we are all aware of organized labor movements and many successes in America, the ingrained assumption of the "boss" has been dominant.

At Social Security and

most government agencies, the "boss" perception will exist only if we allow it. Some managers will manage with a "boss" like style that lacks in collaborative efforts with the employees and every manager differs as to how they actually achieve this.

As employees, we have rights that allow for our input and the effectuation of changes, but this will not happen unless employees take charge and voice their concerns and ideas in a constructive collaboration between fellow employees and management. I hear many complaints from employees—and I am fine with that since we have plenty to complain about—BUT, before complaining, ask yourself if you have taken charge in voicing your concerns constructively and respectfully with fellow employees and/or management. Regardless of the outcome, you will have

made the effort to change the culture in your office from one that has a "boss" to one that is engaged and active. This type of environment will have a lasting positive impact on the entire office.

Not every situation will involve total agreement. But the point is to strive towards working relationship with the people for whom you work — relationships that involve constructive, respectful collaborations. Not doing this means there is no relationship at all.

There are many reasons that unions have been in decline. Employees have become complacent, intimidated and sometimes just plain lazy. This doesn't mean that management doesn't contribute to the problems—but my question to you is what are you going to do about it?

Evidence shows that being complacent, intimidated and lazy will contribute to our decline and employees losing rights and a voice in our work environment. In spite of it all, in this crazy world and crazy times, we still have our collective legitimacy and I want to keep it, maintain it and make it stronger. If we ALL do our part, the sky is the limit and there's no better time to get started than RIGHT NOW!

Inside this issue:

<i>Congressman visit</i>	2
<i>Raffle Winners</i>	2
<i>Fair Practices</i>	3
<i>Photos of Winners</i>	3
<i>Budget Squabbles</i>	4
<i>WFP Survey</i>	7

EAP Program

Help for Employees

By Cassandra Raine

With the hustle and bustle of the holidays, we all know how stressful life can be. Studies have shown that depression is higher during the winter months than any other time of the year. With trying to meet the demands of our workloads and family needs, it can all be very overwhelming.

With a new year upon us, some of us set new goals, resolutions and some will unfortunately be depressed and discouraged because they did not meet the goals they set last year. EAP can help with all of these issues and so much more. Some of the assistance EAP offers is help with personal/family

counseling, health and wellness, legal issues, depression, life changes, work conflicts and more. EAP is confidential and employees are not charged with leave provided they inform their supervisors of their appointments. Let's make a resolution to not allow the stresses of life weigh us

down in 2014. Contact an EAP counselor with any issues that you may be battling or with any questions you may have. There is no cost to the employee for EAP services. The Chicago Region Employee Assistance Program phone number is 1-800-869-0276.

Visiting Congressman Yarmuth

By Amad Ali

More clear to me after my visit on 12/09/13 with Congressman Yarmuth was that our lawmakers have been grossly misinformed about what really goes on at SSA, especially in the field offices. More government employees need to make their voices heard. The way to do this is by contacting and visiting your local Congressmen and Senators. Each field office from every district should assemble teams to make regular visits, send letters, emails and write op-eds for local newspapers. Congressman Yarmuth said today that due to sequestration and relative partisan tensions there is no foreseeable improvements with regard to hiring and pay. I provided the Congressman and his team materials demonstrating past, present and future challenges, as well as suggestions towards improvement.

I also provided their staff information about the quality of internet claims provided by disability firms and law firms who have recorded record profits, increases in walk-in traffic, and the restricting of benefit verifications and numidents that will be forthcoming. It is important that our elected officials hear from us since many have misconceptions about our pay and believe we have more than adequate staff to tackle our increasing workloads. Keeping our jobs, getting our raises, increases in hiring and being able to retire with some dignity will become more difficult if we do not make a better effort in communicating our view and experiences to our lawmakers.



Amad Ali visiting the office of Congressman John Yarmuth.

“We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.”
Martin Luther King, Jr.

Congratulations to our Membership Raffle Winners!

By Jennifer Kirkham

Our annual membership raffle was held at the January Executive Board meeting. Tracy Lykins, Anderson, who has worked for SSA for 6 years, had her name drawn first. When asked how she felt about winning this year's raffle, she was very excited! "I have kids, so the PS4 will be well used", said Traci after deciding which of the 3 prizes she wanted. Our local was able to obtain one of these much sought after gaming systems as a thank you for continuing membership with our Union. Patricia Irwin, Indy NW, was the winner of the \$100 in the new member raffle. She plans to use her prize to celebrate by going out to dinner with her husband and using the rest towards bills or a charity. What a great way to spend her 20th anniversary with SSA! Our final winner was recruiter Mike Daniels, also of Indy NW. He won 2 tickets to an Indiana Pacers/Chicago Bulls game. Being a huge Pacer fan, he was very excited about his winning. He said, "I never win anything!" After working 11 years for SSA and being involved in Unions in previous employers, he encourages other employees to become Union members by giving them a broader view of benefits the Union has fought for like flextime and pay grade increase. Please see additional information and pictures of our winners on page 3.

Women's and Fair Practices

Many of you may not be aware, but as an AFGE member, you have access to an incredible resource, the Women's and Fair Practices Departments. A bit of history about the department is that AFGE established the Fair Practice Department in 1968 to function as the union's civil rights arm and to strengthen and enforce equal opportunity laws. In 1974, AFGE then established the Women's Department, becoming the first government union to establish a department for the betterment of women.

As the Women's and Fair Practice Coordinator for Local 3571, I am

available to answer any EEO questions you may have. I would also like to coordinate programs (i.e. brown bag lunches, quarterly events) to help raise awareness of important issues in our workplace. Attached to this newsletter is a survey that will help me coordinate programs that will be educational and useful to all Local bargaining unit employees. Please take a few minutes to complete and return to me.

If you have any questions pertaining to EEO or the Women's and Fair Practices departments, please contact me via email at Kathryn.Oneil@ssa.gov

by Kathryn O'Neil



Raffle Winners...



Traci Lykins appreciates that Local 3571 is very knowledgeable and is proactive regarding all issues. Enjoy the PS4 and thank you for being a hard working union member!



Mike Daniels is a huge Pacers fan and is looking forward to the game. Mike appreciates AFGE and that he can talk to local officers any time he needs them or has questions



Patricia Irwin wanted to join the Union this year because after this last shutdown she appreciated the efforts of AFGE to see that employees were treated fairly and that we receive the pay and benefits we are due.

**“Join the Union, girls, and together
say Equal Pay for Equal Work”**

Susan B Anthony

Washington's Budget Squabbles

By Edith Garza

The federal workforce is a favorite target of lawmakers on the right who believe government employees are overcompensated. Democratic lawmakers, too, have been asking federal workers to sacrifice during Washington's budget squabbles. President Barack Obama has supported a federal pay freeze that has now lasted more than two years. Most often, commentators make comparisons between federal workers to those in the private sector. It is amazing that pay and benefits packages are compared, but qualifications and duties are ignored. Those who make these comparisons either inadvertently or intentionally fail to mention that the federal workforce is better educated, has unique duties, specialized skill sets and is generally more experienced than their private sector counterparts. It escapes the pundits that in general, federal employees are middle-class Americans living paycheck-to-paycheck. Lost in the bravado of radio personalities is the day to day life experiences and the economic realities of workers who do their level best to serve the public. Despite the demonization, most federal employees are not millionaires, just average citizens worried about being able to pay rent or make their house payment.

There was a time when being a federal employee meant a steady paycheck, great benefits and pride in serving the country. Nowadays, many federal workers are frustrated, anxious and growing tired of being pawns in a never-ending political struggle over government funding. Regardless of the economy, all employees deserve the opportunity to better themselves. It is important to realize that without a more stable and responsible budget situation, the federal government risks losing its most talented and experienced employees. Further, continued fiscal unpredictability will hurt the government's ability to recruit top talent in the future.

Recently, lawmakers furlough employees, explaining that this was the only way to meet the mandated budget reductions. This propelled the country into a 16 day partial government shutdown. However, the standoff did not save a dime; in fact, it was much more expensive than originally estimated. The grandstanding and political theater cost the United States of America an estimated \$24 billion. This, in a still recovering economy with a bloated national debt that was not the fault of the workers who had to suffer for it. Employees were asked or forced to take days off without pay and many others worked without pay. Work furloughs have become popular budgeting tools for many government agencies, both at state and federal levels. Yet they cause more problems than they solve. As in the above recent example, furloughs ultimately do not save money at all. The undue stress, hardship and uncertainty is visited upon the workers, who have little say and nothing to do with the incompetent budgeting decisions that have led us to the paths of uncertainty to begin with. As one might imagine, this "solution" not only affects Federal employees but also the most vulnerable citizens of the community. The quality of services that the public expects- as well as confidence in the federal system is undermined through no fault of the workers, who have been watching real wages decline steadily for the past 30 years.

During furloughs, families had to juggle bills and plead with creditors, not knowing when their next paycheck would arrive. Families on tight budgets have had to either dip into the emergency savings funds or find ways to cut back on expenses for the month to meet financial shortages. During furloughs, workloads do not decrease. To the contrary, more work piled up as employee morale and productivity plummeted. Somehow, employees are expected to accomplish the same amount of work in less time with fewer people. Obviously this formula increases employee stress, customer wait time and error rates. On the other side of the counter, angry clients were aghast upon discovering that even though the Social Security offices were open during normal hours, many of the expected services were not being provided at all.

The Senate voted 81 to 18 to reopen the federal government and raise the nation's borrowing limit just hours before the Treasury Department faced the possibility of being unable to pay all of America's bills. This is a first in modern history. The bill agreed upon will fund the government through Jan. 15 and extend the \$16.7 trillion debt ceiling through Feb. 7. It also includes back pay for unpaid and furloughed federal workers. Yet the proposal has not eased the pain that employees are going through. So the cycle continues. From above, the recommendation has come to prepare for the possibility of another furlough in 2014. Almost every employee can give a story of how this uncaring decision from government has and continues to affect him or her and their families. There are situations in which workers had to borrow money to make a mortgage or rent payments. In one case, a school raised money to provide lunches to students affected.

The following is an actual description of the hardship visited upon Federal workers through the eyes of a Service Representative in Indiana who has worked for the federal government for 27 years:

"I am a representative in a Field Office, so I was considered an essential person, which meant that I had to come to work every day even though we were potentially not getting paid. I take care of my daughter, who lost her job from downsizing and my two grandchildren who are toddlers and disabled, so I was living from payday to payday already before the furlough, trying to make ends meet for my family. When we did not get our full payment, I was struggling to get to work because I did not have enough money for gas. I was borrowing money from friends and others just to make it to work on a daily basis. This was so de-meaning to me to ask others to help me because I am used to being the one who helped others in need. I was ashamed to tell others that I worked for the government. I wasn't being paid, but I had to report daily. Some stated that I should not go, but I was afraid with the threats from Congress and constituents, that if I did not come to work, when it was resolved, I wouldn't get paid for that time. I felt torn while at work, because I could not help the clients to the full extent of my abilities because we were limited to what workloads we could perform. I hated turning the clients away because I knew that they needed those services. Most of the clients were asking for documents in order to qualify for Energy Assistance and Food Stamps. But because of the shutdown, I could not give them that information, even though it was readily available. I could not give people basic information that they needed to get a job, such a social security card or printout. Some of them do not have computers to go online or gas money to go to the library. They depended on us to assist them, but we had them wasting time coming in and being sent away empty-handed. If a furlough happens again, I would still not be prepared because now I am trying to catch up on bills that I put on hold while on the furlough. Congress doesn't seem to care because they are protected under the 21st Amendment, which means they get paid no matter what. If they could walk in my shoes--- the shoes of the average American- for only two weeks, maybe they would reconsider how terribly that they have treated the hard working American citizen and their fellow federal employees."

This is just one example of how the Federal Government shutdown affected not only workers, but also members of the national community. It is an example of many federal employees who have diligently performed their duties for decades. As reward for her dedication and trust, politicians and the general public, deride and attack federal employees like the above for things beyond their control. This is the reward for service. It's time for our politicians to start noticing the struggles that workers are facing and to start creating again an environment of trust. Unions do not have the power to stop furloughs or change law-maker's policies but unions work hard to negotiate fair treatment. Yet the union cannot do it alone. Individual workers, whether members of the union or not must get more involved and speak up about the injustices. Contact your representatives and make your voice heard. One unpaid furlough day is one too many

Send a message to the politicians that we don't want this to happen again contact your local legislator make your voice heard :

<http://iga.in.gov/legislative/2014/legislators/>

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What are your resolutions for 2014?

Try to start out your year by making positive changes. Instead of thinking of things you are going to be taking away from your life with whatever your resolution may be, concentrate on the things you will be adding to it. Think of this time of year as a time to regroup, to consider those things that are important to you, to be grateful to all the people in your life who support you and look forward to the new year at all the things you can accomplish. Do good things for yourself and others in 2014!

**The Local 3571 Executive Board wishes you and yours a
Happy New Year!**



The Union/Women's and Fair Practice Coordinator will be planning programs for members and would like to give you an opportunity to express your interests, needs and ideas.

1. What time would generally be best for you to attend educational programs and/or meetings?

- ☐ a. Saturday
- ☐ b. Sunday
- ☐ c. Weekday evening (which evening _____)
- ☐ d. Lunchtime

2. Please check the areas which you would like the Women's and Fair Practice Coordinator Committee to work on:

- ☐ a. Educational programs or conferences
- ☐ b. Legislative issues - Which issues? _____
- ☐ c. Pay discrimination/pay equity
- ☐ d. Working Family issues
- ☐ e. Sexual Harassment
- ☐ f. Affirmative action
- ☐ g. Domestic violence
- ☐ h. Stress Management
- ☐ i. Other:

3. Please check 5 of the 15 workshops/educational programs listed which would be of most interest to you?

- ☐ a. Pay Equity -- How "women's work" is paid lower than comparable men's work -- and how to start doing something about the problem.
- ☐ b. Harassment -- What the union can do to help members deal with, and prevent, unwanted sexual advances or other harassment which may occur in the workplace.
- ☐ c. Leadership Skills -- How to develop the qualities that will help you become a more effective leader.
- ☐ d. Public Speaking -- How to improve your ability to speak in front of groups.
- ☐ e. Collective Bargaining -- Techniques for bargaining with management about issues of special concern to civil, human, women and workers' rights.
- ☐ f. Political Action -- How to increase the union's political power by becoming involved with political campaigns.
- ☐ g. Young Workers Initiative -- How to get young unionists more involved in AFGE.
- ☐ h. Stress -- How to recognize and manage stress through union action.
- ☐ i. Assertiveness Training -- Techniques for dealing more effectively with people.
- ☐ j. Alcoholism and Drug Abuse -- What the union can do to help members with these problems.
- ☐ k. Domestic Violence -- The union's role in fighting spouse/partner and child abuse.
- ☐ l. Child Care -- Union programs to assist members in getting affordable child care.
- ☐ m. New Technology -- The union's role in helping members cope with new technology in the workplace.
- ☐ n. Women's Committees -- How to start a local women's committee and maintain momentum.
- ☐ o. Other (please list ideas)

4. Are there any issues which the union might develop as special projects which you might be interested in working on?

5. Your job title:

6. Sex: Female _____ Male _____

7. Are you an AFGE member?

Yes _____ Why? _____

No _____ Why Not? _____

Please return by **Feb. 28, 2014** to: Kathy O'Neil, Women's and Fair Practice Coordinator, Local 3571 via fax @ 260-478-1937, or via mail Attn: Kathy O'Neil, SSA, 2122 Lincolnway Ct., Fort Wayne, IN 46819 or email at Kathryn.Oneil@ssa.gov