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NTEU Bulletin

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News, issues and advocacy for federal employees



THE YEAR IN REVIEW

THE President's VIEW



Tony

Anthony M. Reardon
National President

For too many residents in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands — including our NTEU members at CBP and IRS — life is nowhere near back to normal.



Clockwise starting top left: CBP Officers helping in the Virgin Islands; a home in Puerto Rico with a distress call; residents receive water after devastating hurricanes.

Disasters, Failed Plans and **SUFFERING**

Federal employees in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are still suffering. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. ■ I was in San Juan for three days in early December, and what I saw and heard from our members about their living and working conditions since Hurricane Maria hit nearly three months ago is infuriating.

Before I share a few of the details of the deplorable conditions — and the insulting way in which some managers have responded — I want you to know that NTEU will fight for every federal employee in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

We have a situation where federal employees are being forced to work in unsafe conditions; their families continue to live without power or water in their homes; their food and gasoline costs have skyrocketed; and, on top of all of that, their professional dedication is being questioned by managers who pretend the hardship has passed.

As you know, NTEU has two chapters in Puerto Rico: Chapter 188 (CBP Puerto Rico) and Chapter 193 (IRS Puerto Rico). Together, their bargaining units include more than 1,000 frontline federal employees. And Chapter 189 (CBP Virgin Islands) on St. Thomas and Chapter 200 (CBP St. Croix) represent another 100 employees.

While IRS employees are back at work, it does not mean all is well. The working conditions for IRS employees have deteriorated. Serious concerns about security around their workplaces have not been adequately addressed. For many, things are no better at home with a lack of safe drinking water remaining a very real emergency. At Chapter 193's request, I arranged for 17 pallets of water to be shipped to the chapter for distribution to IRS workers.

Even as they struggle to care for their families, IRS managers are routinely denying their leave requests, even leave-without-pay. This is an inhumane response to a still-unfolding human tragedy. And as of this writing, no senior IRS executive from headquarters has gone down to check on their coworkers. This is inexcusable and demonstrates a complete lack of leadership.



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To organize federal employees to work together to ensure that every federal employee is treated with dignity and respect.

—NTEU Mission

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Top left: Chapter 188 (CBP Puerto Rico) Steward Omar Silva, National President Tony Reardon and Chapter 188 President Hiram Gonzalez. Top right: Chapter 193 (IRS Puerto Rico) President Lorna Martinez feels grateful for the 17 pallets of bottled water sent for chapter members by President Reardon. Bottom: President Reardon with Chapter 193 members during his recent visit.

I visited CBP members at the San Juan Airport to see, and smell, firsthand what it's like for CBP employees to work long shifts surrounded by moldy walls, leaky ceilings, damp carpets, puddles of waters and dank air. Even though the worst areas are roped off, the atmosphere is headache-inducing. I am worried about the long-term health of our CBP employees there, and I have demanded that the Occupational Safety and Health Administration be brought in.

No one in the United States of America should be forced to work in such hazardous conditions.

I'm alarmed by what I heard about the immediate aftermath of the crisis from nearly every single CBP employee I met: Managers got hotel rooms, air conditioned offices and hot meals, while everyone else suffered. Communication about scheduling, duties and even who was in charge was poor to non-existent. And those employees who didn't evacuate the island and stayed behind to work received not thanks but questions about wearing proper uniforms. I have already requested that CBP reward them for filling in wherever they were needed. They went above and beyond, and it is time the agency recognized and rewarded that.

The COOP — the Continuity of Operations Plan — failed. I'll be asking agency leadership to conduct after-action reporting and to dramatically improve this plan. It is important that CBP demonstrate that it learned the lessons of Hurricane Maria and understands the necessity of including the valuable input of frontline employees.

I applaud the people of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands for their commitment to recovery and they are making progress every day.

But for too many residents — including our NTEU members at CBP and IRS — life is nowhere near back to normal. Just because one employee has returned to a standard work schedule doesn't mean everyone is ready or able to do so. Too many of them work a full shift, stand in line for hours to buy fuel or water, sit for hours in traffic because side roads are impassable, and barely scrape together enough money to buy prepared food because their homes still don't have electricity to run freezers, refrigerators and stoves.

Empathy should not have an expiration date. I have alerted CBP and IRS leadership that employees still need flexibility to take care of their families and their homes, and in many, many cases, extended family members who are depending on them.

NTEU: some of our own are hurting. They appreciate everything our union has done to date, including sending money and supplies. Our chapter leaders have been heroic in the face of chaos. But these dedicated federal employees in Puerto Rico, St. Thomas and St. Croix are angry that the government they serve is not listening to them.

At my request, two top CBP officials are planning to travel to San Juan in January and I am arranging for them to hear directly from frontline employees. I intend to do the same with IRS leadership. And I will be traveling to St. Thomas and St. Croix early in 2018.

For now, keep your Puerto Rican and Virgin Islands colleagues in mind and share their stories. Their plight may have fallen off the front pages, but they still need our help to get their lives, their agencies and their beautiful islands back to normal. <#>



The photos above were taken by President Reardon during his visit to CBP facilities in Puerto Rico and indicate the horrific working conditions facing agency employees every day. Among the issues are torn insulation that releases fiberglass into the air, damaged ceilings that allow rainwater to drip through, and many areas with heavy mold. While some of these areas are roped off, CBP employees are working right next to them, and the dangerous air quality encompasses the entire airport and cargo facilities.

“In times of change and in times of transition, when everyone at the top is either coming or going, you are the people who keep our great country running, protecting our citizens and safeguarding our nation, never missing a beat.”

—NATIONAL PRESIDENT TONY REARDON
THE WASHINGTON POST, MARCH 3

In 2017...

...we spoke out.

NTEU’s advocacy skills were tested immediately at the start of 2017 when federal employees were targeted with all manner of unfair criticism and outright threats to their jobs. Hiring freezes, proposals to dramatically slash both agency budgets and numbers of employees, plus attempts to target and weaken the independence of federal scientists were just some of the initial challenges in the first few weeks of the year. At every turn, we stood up and defended the integrity of frontline federal workers.

At the annual Legislative Conference NTEU members traveled to Washington in February to meet with their members of Congress. The face-to-face meetings allowed union members to explain what they do for the American public and why it is important for Congress to support employees and their agencies. The three-day event included a rally on the Capitol lawn that drew widespread media coverage and anchored our presence in the tense budget negotiations, and demonstrated to legislators the number of constituents they have who serve in a large variety of federal roles and occupations.

Our union helped whip up support for federal scientists and researchers, especially those at the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Energy whose groundbreaking work on public health and climate-related issues was being questioned by the new administration. NTEU leaders and members participated in a rally at EPA headquarters in Washington in March to protest massive cuts to the agency’s budget, and



March for Science Chapter 295 (EPA San Francisco)

NTEU chapters in several cities took part in the national March for Science in April.

Important advocacy work also took place inside many agencies. For example, NTEU raised the alarm about the IRS program to allow private debt collection agencies to pursue overdue federal tax bills from American taxpayers. Congress recently mandated the IRS try again after previous failed efforts, but the tactics of the private contractors are being strongly criticized and monitored by some U.S. senators and consumer groups.

At Customs and Border Protection, NTEU single-handedly alerted Congress to the shortcomings in various hiring and funding proposals that fail to address the staffing shortages affecting CBP Officers and Agriculture Specialists. National President Tony Reardon testified about the staffing needs at the ports of entry and has gained bipartisan allies on the Hill who agree. A Senate and House committee have approved legislation authorizing additional recruitment and retention bonuses and other incentive programs to help CBP address staffing shortages in hard-to-fill rural and remote duty assignments.

NTEU sought support for paid parental leave for federal employees from a series of government officials. Reardon in May sent a letter to presidential adviser Ivanka Trump asking for her support to pass the Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act of 2017. The bill would provide federal employees with six weeks of paid leave to welcome a new child into their family. ☑



National President Reardon testifies on CBP issues.



Chapter 26 (IRS Georgia)



Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) speaks at the 2017 Legislative Conference rally



Chapter 242 (FDIC Chicago)



CBP contract training Chapter 155 (CBP Ohio)

...we won big.



Chapter 45 (IRS Oklahoma)



Chapter 250 (ACF Headquarters)

In tough times, it takes a tough union that can push back, fight hard and get results. NTEU is that union.

All year long, NTEU put money in the pockets of employees who were not treated fairly in their workplaces.

At Customs and Border Protection (CBP), NTEU won a historic settlement exceeding \$200 million to resolve a dozen national grievances filed over a decade on scheduling, work assignments and overtime violations. Covered CBP Officers and Agriculture Specialists are set to receive cash and time off awards in the new year.

We continued our long streak of winning tens of thousands of dollars in retroactive transit subsidy benefits at represented agencies. After filing grievances at the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Health and Human Services, NTEU secured retroactive subsidies for multiple years when actual public transit commuting costs were greater than the maximum subsidy in effect at the time.

At the bargaining table we won an additional 2 percent pay raise for bargaining unit employees at the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC). NTEU held firm to the argument that pay for CFTC employees should align with other federal financial regulatory agencies, and the Federal Service Impasses Panel agreed, granting employees the increase they deserve.

All federal employees — and the taxpayers they serve — will continue to benefit from important legislative wins NTEU notched. The union helped preserve the long-standing ban on competitions between federal employees and private contractors. The competitions are inherently unfair to federal employees, make government less accountable and waste money by replacing in-house employees with for-profit contractors.

In another win that benefits federal employees government-wide, NTEU scored a legislative victory when Congress passed legislation giving participants in the Thrift Savings Plan long-awaited flexibilities and more withdrawal options.

Of course, not all NTEU victories are about money. At the IRS, we won two representational wins that are critically important to the employees they impact.

In Tulsa, Okla., we fought relentlessly for 14 months to move employees out of an abysmal workspace — plagued by mold, sewage backups, missing handrails and other health and safety hazards — to a healthy, safe working environment.

In Covington, Ky., NTEU's efforts resulted in perhaps the most monumental payoff — saving jobs. After the IRS announced it was closing Submission Processing (SP) operations in Covington, we engaged in months of complicated bargaining. The result: a win-win agreement that maximizes buyouts for impacted employees who want to retire while giving hundreds of seasonal employees a chance to keep their jobs. We plan to use this groundbreaking agreement — which sets up a potential three-way swap among employees — as a model in future SP negotiations where NTEU is working to save jobs. 



“THEY WORK FOR US”

PSAs broadcasted

713

times in English and Spanish
and reached more than

865k

26

TESTIMONIES delivered to Congress



900+

CHAPTER LEADERS'
WORKPLACE SURVEYresponses featured in
multiple media outlets

National President Tony Reardon spent 5 hours on a media blitz busting federal employee myths on more than

**20 RADIO AND TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAMS
TO AN AUDIENCE OF MORE THAN**

15.3 million



We have distributed

MORE THAN

85

PRESS RELEASES

to local and national media outlets

400+

MENTIONS in news publications
and broadcasts throughout America

**FEDERAL EMPLOYEES' VIEWPOINT
FEATURED IN MAJOR NEWS OUTLETS
IN 2017, INCLUDING:**

The New York Times

AP Associated Press

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

POLITICO

Bloomberg

The Washington Post



REUTERS

...we told our story.

...we fought in the workplace.

Protecting and expanding rights and benefits is at the core of NTEU's mission, and there were new challenges at the bargaining table this year.

Bargaining unit members at the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) overwhelmingly voted in favor of a new three-year agreement, and that strong contract kept the agency on the 'Best Places to Work' within the federal government list. That honor stems largely from Workplace Excellence Councils—a joint program set up by NTEU and FDIC. Now in its fifth year, the councils empower frontline workers to shape their office environment and carry out the agency mission.

For the first time ever, employees working at the National Park Service National Capital Region negotiated a new three-year contract as NTEU members. Provisions for proper pay during emergency or weather events, telework and a uniform allowance untouched for 20 years all were reached because of union representation.

After prolonged negotiations, NTEU and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) settled on new six-year contract, a win at the bargaining table for members. One of the biggest improvements allows CBP Officers and Agriculture Specialists to bid on all port work units, schedules and

shifts with assignments determined by seniority.

NTEU also laid the groundwork for protecting the rights of employees at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, who faced another year of industry changes and budgetary pressure. After receiving reduction-in-force notices, we worked with the agency to prevent dedicated federal employees from losing their jobs. Through proactive negotiations and partnership with the agency, positions were found for employees whose jobs were facing elimination.

Employees at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau remain dedicated to protecting everyday Americans despite continued attacks on the agency. Threats to the agency's mission are at an all-time high, and NTEU is focused on fighting harmful legislation that would weaken the independence of the agency.

Other financial regulatory agencies also faced serious threats, like proposals that would weaken their ability to protect the integrity of America's financial system. NTEU aligned with watchdog groups, sent letters and advocated on behalf of the regulatory agencies that safeguard our nation's economic security. 



Chapter 47 (IRS Manhattan)



Chapter 72 (IRS Austin Campus)



Chapter 284 (IRS Atlanta Campus)



Chapter 213 (DOE DC) with National President Tony Reardon and Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-Md.)



Chapter 270 (IRS Franklin, Tenn.)



2017 Legislative Conference rally

...we welcomed new members.



Federal employees are drawn to the strong representation NTEU offers and in 2017 we welcomed two new bargaining units. They allow us to amplify our voice, and we can fight harder and more effectively for all our members. This year, employees at the Commodity Futures Trading Commission in New York voted for our representation, along with employees at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers. We added a new chapter — 338 (FLETC) — into the fold and are stronger thanks to our new members. 



Future NTEU Member

...we protected our future.

The threats to the federal workforce have been many these last 12 months, but none have been more persistent and unsettling than the repeated attempts to cut retirement benefits. Starting with the administration's proposed budget and all the way through the congressional session, there were various proposals that would make federal employees pay more for fewer benefits in their senior years.

NTEU and thousands of federal employees called their members of Congress and kept these insidious plans to cut benefits at bay for the whole year. They are by no means dead and will likely resurface in 2018. But the lesson is clear: If you try to take away the retirement security — and peace of mind — that federal employees have rightfully earned, NTEU will fight back.

A key turning point in the fight for your future was in July, when thousands of NTEU members joined President Reardon on a telephone town hall to discuss the proposed retirement cuts and were then motivated to flood Capitol Hill with messages of opposition. Our power to stop such threats comes directly from our ability to harness your collective voices from every congressional district in the country.

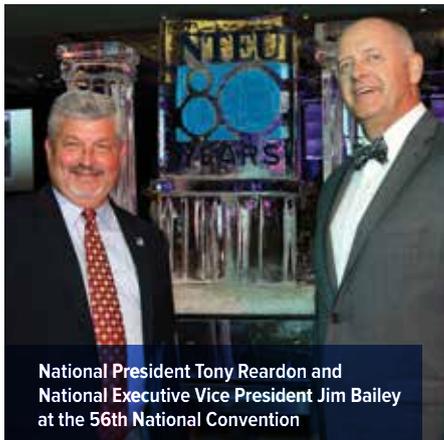
Even before retirement, federal employees faced other challenges to their ability to put money away in a retirement nest egg. We backed proposals for a 3.2 percent pay raise next year, well above the 1.4 percent across-the-board raise recommended by the administration. We also called for pay parity with the military, which is in line for a 2.4 percent raise. NTEU always fights for the highest raise possible so federal employees can keep pace with wage increases in the private sector and ultimately have enough to retire with dignity.

For those working in agencies under acute budget pressures, NTEU has vowed to provide employees with as many options as possible, including transfers, retraining, severance payments, early retirements or phased retirements. The first goal is always to fight for adequate agency funding but when agency management issues a reduction in force notice, we are prepared with alternatives to try and prevent anyone from being involuntarily separated from federal service.

NTEU was instrumental in garnering bipartisan support for increasing the amount of the Voluntary Separation Incentive Payment (VSIP) from \$25,000 to \$40,000, and the legislation is still pending. The amount would put non-defense agencies on par with the Pentagon, and make the VSIP program more of a real option for some employees.

Proposals to eliminate the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program have not been approved, thanks in part to NTEU's campaign to preserve the program. It makes higher education more affordable and helps the government recruit and retain highly-skilled professionals.

NTEU also is concerned about how your personal information will be treated in the future. We have appealed a lower court decision dismissing our lawsuit that alleges the Office of Personnel Management's indifference to securing its databases led to the cyber breaches that compromised the personal data of millions of federal workers. [\[Link\]](#)



National President Tony Reardon and National Executive Vice President Jim Bailey at the 56th National Convention



Chapter 97 (IRS Fresno Service Center)



2017 Legislative Conference rally



Chapter 173 (CBP Detroit)



2 **Disasters, Failed Plans and Suffering**



4 **2017 in Review**



6 **Welcome to New Members**

2017 Remembered for Hurricanes, Wildfires and Devastation

Countless reports of natural disasters and the devastation they wrought controlled the airwaves this year. Among the millions of Americans in the path of the storms and fires were thousands of NTEU members and other federal employees.

Along with their neighbors, many NTEU members had their lives uprooted as they suffered through winds, flooding, power outages and the loss of homes and personal property.

Nevertheless, they stepped up to help their fellow citizens and to make sure their agencies were able to operate. Those in the path of the storms and wildfires were joined by federal employees from outside the disaster areas who quickly answered the call for help.

Those not able to help in person helped in other ways.

Donations to the NTEU Disaster Fund exceeded National President Tony Reardon's initial goal of \$30,000, and he quickly matched every

donation dollar-for-dollar. Through this fund, all federal employees at any NTEU-represented agency can apply for grants to repair damage to their homes and get back on their feet.

That was not all. Often, people in overwhelming life emergencies do not have the leave they need

“There is never a question about whether we should help. It is always about how we can help.”

—NATIONAL PRESIDENT TONY REARDON

to tend to their needs. NTEU members stepped up to the plate generously donating hours of leave to help their coworkers after the union pushed for Emergency Leave Transfer Programs.

NTEU chapter presidents played crucial on-the-ground roles in accounting for their members and checking on their safety. National President Reardon received updates from them

on the needs of federal workers who were adversely impacted by these calamities; and they took on the challenge of fighting for appropriate leave so employees could do what they needed to care for their families.

NTEU chapters across the country initiated collections of money, food, water and other necessities for fellow union members in dire need. Some chapters went the extra mile and drove needed supplies directly into the disaster areas.

NTEU is committed to ensuring the full recovery of members who are still living with issues related to this year's natural disasters.

In 2017, NTEU members demonstrated what they do for the American public each day: they work with courage, generosity and honor.

“Thank you for all that you have done. I know that our thoughts remain with every person impacted by the natural disasters. We will continue to fight for your well-being in 2018,” Reardon said. ☐

Ongoing Shutdown Threats and Federal Pay Round Out the Year

The lurking threat of a government shutdown never fully dissipated in 2017, and December was certainly no different. The calendar year ended with yet another continuing resolution that allowed the government to remain open through Jan. 19.

Averting a government shutdown is always preferable, but NTEU continues to urge Congress to provide adequate funding to all government agencies through the end of the 2018 fiscal year. Federal employees know better than most that lurching from one stop-gap funding measure to the next makes it harder for agencies to plan for the longer term, administer programs effectively and it causes anxiety among employees and taxpayers.

Allies of federal employees have introduced legislation to make sure federal employees are paid in the event of a shutdown. NTEU will be on Capitol Hill over the next several weeks encouraging Congress to reach a spending agreement that eliminates the shutdown threat and provides agencies with the resources they need for the rest of the year.

Included among the agencies in dire need of additional funding is the Internal Revenue Service, which is now tasked with implementing the largest change to the tax code in 30 years. This massive new responsibility lands on the agency's shoulders as it already struggles with cuts over the last few years totaling nearly \$1 billion dollars and the loss of more than 20,000 employees.

National President Tony Reardon has been vocal in urging for additional funding for the IRS and other agencies that do not have the funding they

need to successfully meet their missions.

As the year ended, Congress was silent on the federal pay increase thus allowing the administration's proposal of a 1.4 percent across-the-board increase with 0.5 percent average increases to locality pay rates to take effect. This is disappointing news for federal employees who are lagging behind their private-sector counterparts where wages in 2018 are expected to grow by 3 percent.

“Let this be yet another lesson for Congress and the administration, that failing to meet their basic obligation of keeping the government running is causing real damage to agencies' ability to serve taxpayers efficiently and effectively,” President Reardon said. “The government needs a stable, steady year-long budget that provides agencies with adequate resources to carry out their missions of securing the nation, safeguarding the economy and providing for the public health.”

Agency funding is not the only issue yet to be resolved. Also still looming are required spending caps for FY2018 and beyond that will force sequestration — across the board budget cuts — unless the caps are raised. We also expect debate on raising the debt ceiling and reforming mandatory spending on programs like Social Security and Medicare. These issues increase the chance that federal employee compensation will again be targeted in 2018, and NTEU stands ready to fight any proposal that would harm federal employees. ☐