



**Donating Food**

**Staff the VA**



**Activism**



**Organizing**

## Forward Together

**AFGE Member Activism is at an All-Time High**



**Phone Banking**



**Disaster Relief**



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

**B**rothers and sisters, in late October, we were successful in keeping cuts to your pay, retirement, and health care out of the fiscal 2018 budget resolution. This is largely due to your activism. In four months, AFGE members made just over 42,000 calls to Congress. The week before the budget vote, we made 10,000 calls. It's worth repeating: 10,000 calls in one week.

### **It just goes to show that your voices matter.**

We are a union of members who care about making our country a better place. That's why you do the work that you do on behalf of the American people.

***Whether you help protect the environment at EPA, guard our borders at Border Patrol, serve our veterans at the VA, or support our service members at DoD – you serve the American public, on and off the clock.***

Just last month, our Y.O.U.N.G program raised \$46,000 that went directly to survivors of Hurricanes Harvey, Maria, and Irma. Many of you have volunteered through federal programs to assist with on-the-ground relief efforts in Texas, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Louisiana, and California. Whether you made calls, donated money, worked on the ground, or visited your congressional offices – you are what makes this union strong. You are what makes this country strong.

On Dec. 8, the federal government again will run out of money, and again we will face a potential government shutdown. We must also stand firm in opposing a tax reform plan that would raise taxes on you, working class and middle-class workers.

***Congress and the administration's proposed cuts would limit services largely benefiting lower-income Americans, and deliver huge tax cuts to millionaires and billionaires.***

The current tax reform plan increases our national debt and leaves the door open to further cuts to federal employees and federal agencies. These are not the American values you work so hard to uphold.

We will need to come together once again to fight these lawmakers' attempts to thwart the great work that we do. I fight every day for the great members of our union, and I know I can count on you to add your voice and fight for our jobs, our pay, and our benefits.

Thank you for your service to this country. May you and your loved ones have a safe and happy holiday season.

In Solidarity,

### **AFGE—THE GOVERNMENT STANDARD**

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# Wages, Benefits Update for 2018



AFGE leadership represents members during a meeting of the Federal Salary Council

**F**ederal employees and retirees will see their wages and benefits rise in January, but those gains are offset by years of cuts and higher costs for health care and other expenses.

Federal workers will receive a 1.9 percent average pay increase in 2018, divided between a 1.4 percent across-the-board increase and a 0.5 percent locality raise that varies based on where employees work. OPM will publish the specific locality rates on its website, [www.opm.gov](http://www.opm.gov), before the first pay period of the new year.

## Health Insurance Premiums Rising

Federal employees and retirees will pay 6.1 percent more for health insurance premiums next year. The government's share of those premiums will increase 3.2 percent. This continues a long trend of the government shifting costs onto federal workers and retirees.

On average, enrollees in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) will pay an additional \$5.57 every two weeks for self-only coverage, \$12.55 for self-plus-one plans, and \$12.17 for family coverage.

Biweekly premiums for enrollees under Blue Cross and Blue Shield's standard option, the most popular plan in the federal program, will rise \$7.17 for self-only, \$17.04 for self-plus-one, and \$17.72 for family coverage. Premiums also are increasing an average of 1.26 percent for dental plans and decreasing by 0.48

percent for vision coverage, OPM said.

## New Locality Rates Stalled

AFGE continues to apply pressure on the White House to provide employees in certain regions with higher locality pay rates.

The Federal Salary Council, on which AFGE serves, recommends creating separate locality pay areas in Burlington, Vt., and Virginia Beach, Va. The areas have pay gaps that are more than 10 percentage points above the pay gap for the "Rest of U.S." locality area.

Although the president's top pay advisors approved this recommendation in 2016, regulations have not been issued by the Office of Management and Budget and the Office of Personnel Management to allow these new locality rates to take effect.

## COLA Increasing for Retirees

Social Security beneficiaries will see a 2 percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) starting in December, the government announced in October. This increase applies to federal retirees under the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS), who pay into the Social Security system in addition to contributing to their pensions and Thrift Savings Plan investments.

This is the biggest increase in Social Security benefits in six years, due to higher gasoline prices caused by this season's hurricanes. But it still comes to only \$25 extra a month for the average beneficiary.



## Forward Together:

**M**aking phone calls. Raising money. Donating time. And speaking up for those who can't speak for themselves. It's hard work, but our AFGE members are doing it.

Over the years, our union family has faced incredible odds—and won. This year alone, we have faced a near government shutdown, a federal hiring freeze, threats to federal retirement, and a devastating series of natural disasters that have rocked the lives of AFGE members from California to Puerto Rico.

Yet amid chaos and destruction, AFGE members continue to come together in solidarity to help their fellow Americans.

Members like Christopher Shepherd: a member of AFGE Local 2063 in Albuquerque, New Mexico, who made 90 patch-through calls from his personal cell phone to oppose proposed cuts to federal employee pay and retirement.

"I never really knew what was on the line when I started working at the VA," says Shepherd, 35.

"Once I joined AFGE I learned what was going to happen with my paycheck, my retirement. So I took it into my own hands to try and make a difference. I feel like I am being a responsible person in my community and in the VA. I am fighting for my own rights and everyone else's rights too. Even if they don't understand the magnitude of what can happen

or if they don't believe in the union. My goal is to protect myself and others."

And members like Louise Byrd of Local 96. This summer, Byrd made 364 calls to oppose the budget. A VA employee for 20 years and an AFGE member for 10, Byrd makes her calls every night before she goes to bed.

"Some nights I'm tired but I have to stay up and make the calls," says Byrd. "It's a sacrifice, but it's a sacrifice I'm willing to make because I know what's at stake."

### Y.O.U.N.G. Raises \$47,000 for Hurricane Victims

When news spread of the devastation left behind by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, members of AFGE's National Young Organizing Unionists for the Next Generation (Y.O.U.N.G.) Committee sprang into action.

Y.O.U.N.G. coordinators from Districts 5, 6, 10, and 14 set a goal to raise \$10,000 at the recent 2017 Regional P.O.R.T. Leadership Academy held in Galveston, Texas. Within the first day, they had exceeded their goal by more than \$25,000.

By the end of the training the committee had raised more than \$47,000 in relief funds for victims of the recent hurricanes.



## AFGE Member Activism is at an All-Time High

“As government employees, we have a hard-enough time fighting against attacks from Congress that put our jobs in jeopardy, and trying to maintain a good stable life for our families,” says Francis Nichols III, District 14 Y.O.U.N.G. coordinator and AFGE National Pride coordinator. “I’m sure you can imagine the added stress of having to deal with the aftermath of an unexpected natural disaster.”

The money raised will be donated to the AFGE Disaster Relief Fund and used to directly assist AFGE members and their families who were affected by the hurricanes.

Members of the committee who worked to raise the money include: Vincent Blasingame and Shekina Givens, District 5; Joel Smith, District 10; and Bianca Smith and Francis Nichols III, District 14. You can donate to the fund at: [www.feea.org/giveafgerelief](http://www.feea.org/giveafgerelief)

### AFGE Member April Bizzelle Helps Battered Women

At age 58, April Bizzelle has been a federal employee for 18 years and an AFGE member for 12. Bizzelle has organized several locals and serves as the Chief Steward of Local 31. Once a victim of domestic violence in the past, today Bizzelle dedicates her life to helping women and children who find themselves in the same dire situation.

When several women in her agency faced removal for extended absences, Bizzelle was perhaps the only member of her all-male executive board who suspected what was going on.

“My responsibility as a board member was to do the research and that’s what I did,” says Bizzelle. “Once I got these women to a level of comfort, they explained what they had been through. One was in a coma and unresponsive for two months. She had no way of reaching out and communicating with the agency.”

“These women didn’t want to come to work with black eyes and bruises and were missing work because of it. I was a victim of domestic violence and because of that I have a passion for battered women. I try to help them get back their lives.”

Bizzelle helped the women apply for assistance provided by the state for domestic violence victims and placed them in self-defense classes.

This year, Bizzelle was honored with a Wings of Excellence Award for outstanding community service by the Federal Executive Board. She has also been recognized by her District with the Augusta Thomas Humanitarian Award.

**Are You Ready to Take Action? Visit [afge.org/WIN](http://afge.org/WIN)**

## Congress Looks to Expand Bad VA Reforms Governmentwide



AFGE members at a Reno rally to save the VA

It's been three months since the President signed the Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017 into law. The bill was pitched to Congress by Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida as a new piece of legislation that removed bad actors from the VA, while protecting whistleblowers on the job. In reality, it's no more than a firing bill that can be used to silence whistleblowers.

Now members of Congress like Rep. Brad Wenstrup want to expand these bad reforms governmentwide. In a letter to colleagues and agency heads, Wenstrup solicits support on extending the VA reforms to workers at other agencies.

Here's what the law means for VA workers:

- Destroys fairness protections for employees when poor managers want to fire them for no reason.
- Allows the VA to claw back retirement benefits and bonuses of any VA employee under some circumstances.
- Makes defending yourself against allegations in the workplace almost impossible.
- Prohibits arbitrators and Merit System Protection Board (MSPB) judges from reducing the penalty, even if the evidence warrants a lesser punishment.

Thus far it has been wielded as a weapon against low-graded, low-wage employees – a majority of which (nearly 50 percent) are veterans and minorities. And sadly, the accountability seems to have stopped there.

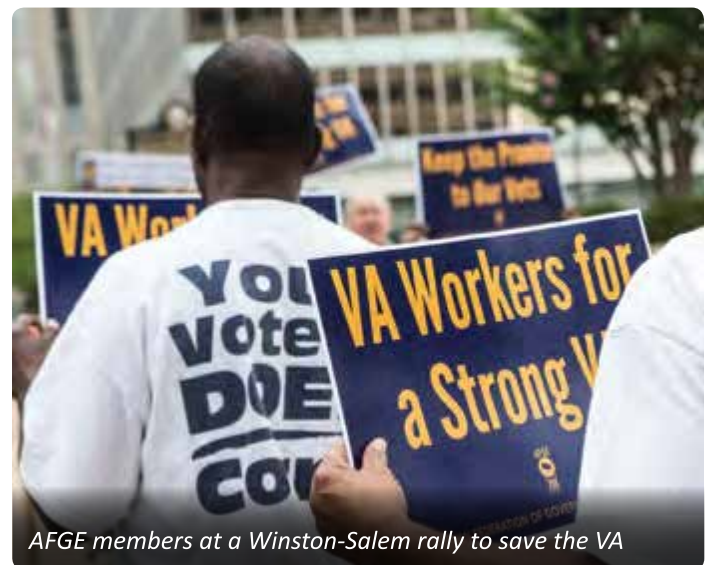
Since Sen. Rubio first introduced his anti-worker legislation back in June, AFGE has been in firm opposition. We believed then what we still believe now:

- Collective bargaining rights must be preserved.
- Full access to and rights at the MSPB must be preserved.
- All employees should have equal rights to appeal performance and conduct actions.
- Seizure of pensions must be consistent with the laws established by the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA).

Unfortunately, insiders on Capitol Hill disagreed and now public servants at the VA are fighting for their livelihoods.

But, despite the best efforts of those in Congress to strip away your rights at work, AFGE is still standing up for you. Since President Trump signed the Accountability Act into law, we have:

- Continued evaluating and fighting against excessive penalties against our members.
- Gone to lawmakers because we believe the VA is being abusive with the implementation of the law.
- Filed a grievance over the publication of the firing list because it violates your privacy.
- Held trainings across the country for you to learn how you can fight back!



AFGE members at a Winston-Salem rally to save the VA

## Federal Employees Playing Major Role in Hurricane Response



*Volunteers help flooding victims in Texas*

**A**s summer drew to a close, tens of thousands of federal workers responded to the trio of hurricanes that caused catastrophic damage and loss of life across large sections of the country.

While FEMA and its partner agencies within the Department of Homeland Security led the response efforts, many employees from other government agencies provided critical support either through their regular jobs or as part of a volunteer task force. As of late September, almost 2,200 federal volunteers were on the ground as part of FEMA's Surge Capacity Force, with hundreds more volunteers ready to deploy. This includes more than 900 federal workers outside DHS.

Even as recovery efforts continued following Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, more than 2,600 DoD personnel headed to the Caribbean islands of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands to help provide relief from Hurricane Maria.

Military teams from the Marine Corps and Navy have conducted medical evacuations and airlifts, delivered more than 22,200 pounds of relief supplies and cargo to the devastated U.S. territories, and helped clear streets of debris. Army Black Hawk helicopters were rerouted from Kentucky to the San Juan International Airport in Puerto Rico to help distribute supplies. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers worked closely with Puerto Rico emergency managers to inspect and assess the safety of the Guajataca Dam.

Military and civilian employees within DoD and the Health and Human Services Department evacuated more than 150 hospital patients from the affected islands to locations statewide. Members of the National Guard were deployed from bases across the country to help with a range of missions, including search and rescue, transporting personnel and equipment, and airlift support.

**AFGE Disaster Relief Fund**  
[www.feea.org/giveafgerelief](http://www.feea.org/giveafgerelief)



**Donated funds benefit AFGE members and their families in need.**



**2018**

**LEGISLATIVE & GRASSROOTS  
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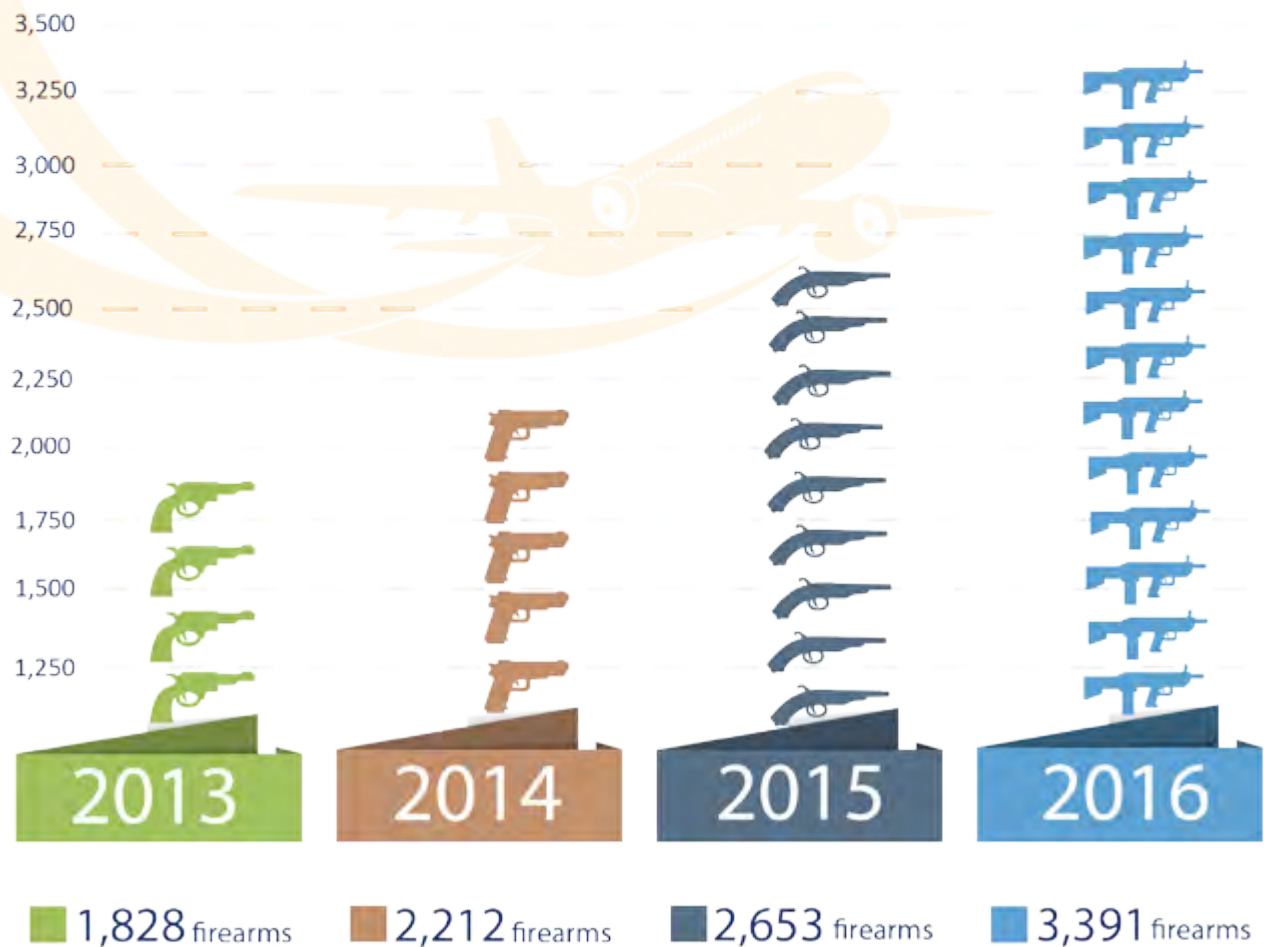
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Sunday, February 11 to Wednesday, February 14, 2018  
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# TSA Blocks Firearms

Since 2013, TSA Officers have confiscated a record number of firearms and weapons at airport checkpoints nationwide. In 2016 alone, TSOs stopped an average of **eight guns a day** from getting on our airplanes. But guns are not the only weapons TSA Officers confiscate. TSOs have found explosives, knives, and even a rocket launcher in passenger carry-on luggage.



Visit [www.afge.org/TSA](http://www.afge.org/TSA) to learn how AFGE protects the workplace rights of TSA Officers.



## Contract Negotiations Begin for DC Government Workers



*AFGE Field Services and Education Director David Cann leads training session on contract negotiations*

**D**istrict 14 is moving full steam ahead with a host of contract negotiations for its D.C. government employees. District workers are unique from their federal counterparts represented by AFGE in that they are able to directly bargain over wages. Key issues on the table include, but are not limited to: wages, insurance benefits, retirement benefits, disability benefits, homeowners' assistance

Recreation, Housing, the Fire Department, and Water and Sewer Authority.

AFGE's bargaining teams will focus on updating basic workplace rights, fairness in overtime and scheduling, transparency in various award processes, and improving performance evaluation procedures.

programs, and leave accruals. AFGE Legal Rights Attorney Keisha Williams will be leading the contract negotiations for other District 14 locals. District 14 National Vice President Eric Bunn is leading the negotiations for compensation unit 1 and 2.

The workers represented in these ongoing negotiations provide services through many D.C. government agencies, including Public Works, Transportation, Parks and

## P.O.R.T. Trains AFGE Members in Political Activism

**T**he 2017 P.O.R.T. Leadership Academy took place in Galveston, Texas, and trained activists in the areas of political and legislative action, organizing, representation, and peer training. The conference was initially developed under the leadership of AFGE District 5 National Vice President Everett Kelley, who answered the call for more district-based training. District 5 held the first P.O.R.T. Leadership Academy in November 2011. This year, Districts 10 and 14 returned as regional partners of the training, and were also joined by District 6.

The P.O.R.T. Leadership Academy this year featured its first-ever Living Legend Award. The honor was given to District 6 National Vice President Arnold Scott for his decades of uncompromised leadership and service to the labor movement.

Attendees enjoyed a graduation banquet at the end of the week, highlighted by the AFGE Y.O.U.N.G. Committee's efforts to raise money for those dealing with the devastation from recent hurricanes. The campaign raised more than \$47,000 for the AFGE Disaster Relief Fund.



*P.O.R.T. Leadership Academy*

## In Case of Shutdown, Here's What You Need to Know



This summer, Congress averted a government shutdown by passing a continuing resolution and funding the government through early December. But if Congress does not pass a clean budget before that deadline, the federal government will be closed for business.

So what would this mean, exactly? For starters, federal workers like us would be furloughed without pay. Others deemed “essential” would be required to work during the shutdown, but won’t get paid either. And there’s no guarantee we would earn back pay once the government re-opens.

Government agencies would stop serving communities. Seniors and veterans would go without benefits, national parks would close, food would go uninspected, tax refunds would go unissued, medical

research would grind to a halt, and much more.

Worst of all, taxpayers would foot the bill: the last big government shutdown in 2013 cost the country \$24 billion.

These agencies aren’t just in Washington, D.C. In fact, 85 percent of all government workers live outside the nation’s capital. They work on military bases, in law

enforcement, as doctors and nurses in our VA health care system, as researchers, as Border Patrol agents, as Transportation Security Officers, and so much more. If the government shuts down, we lose these services and these workers lose their pay — forcing thousands of families to struggle to pay for basics.

***So how can you take action? Call your lawmakers at 844-669-5146 and tell them to pass a clean budget to continue funding the government, and to stop making cuts to federal agencies and services.***

Tell them that you’re proud to serve your community as a government employee, and tell them it’s time that they pay their bills so that we can pay ours.

## Support Our Nation's Veterans

**Text: "veterans" to 225568 • Visit: [www.afge.org/forveterans](http://www.afge.org/forveterans)**

## How to Trim Years Off Your Contract Negotiations

One of AFGE's bargaining councils has cut the time it takes to negotiate a new contract from more than six years to less than two weeks – and you can do it too.

The not-so-secret technique relies on both labor and management coming to the table without any specific proposals or solutions. Instead, both sides identify issues they want to address and then work through a mediator to reach a resolution that serves everyone's interests.

"It's a collaborative approach supported by reaching consensus," said Troy Tingey, president of AFGE Council 214, which represents 35,000 employees who work for the Air Force Materiel Command.

The technique is called Interest-Based Bargaining, or IBB. "Invariably, 80 to 90 percent of the issues are mutual. If you take care of the mutual ones, you'll get there," said David Martinez, a commissioner with the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS) in Albuquerque, N.M.

When Council 214's master labor agreement came up for renewal in 2001, they turned to IBB to avoid a repeat of the six years it took to negotiate the previous contract. Representatives from the council and the Air Force Materiel Command sat down with Martinez in August 2001. They held two days of training on the IBB process before starting to discuss issues each side wanted to explore. By October, they had a tentative agreement to present to the



bargaining unit for ratification.

The process took 21 days from start to finish – a remarkable achievement, especially as the Sept. 11 attacks occurred during the middle of negotiations. "It was tough, but the process made it so much easier," Martinez said.

The results were so successful that the council and agency have used IBB twice since then, negotiating new master labor agreements in 2010 and again this year. The length of negotiations has shrunk each time: it took just 8 days to reach agreement on the contract this year, down from 15 days in 2010 and 21 in 2001.

"Once you get the upper management buy-in, once you commit to the IBB process, you can't really walk away without an agreement," Tingey said.

Every FMCS mediator is trained in interest-based bargaining. Locals or councils can find a mediator by visiting [www.fmcs.gov](http://www.fmcs.gov).

### 2018 AFGE National Convention

In accordance with the AFGE National Constitution, you are hereby notified that the 41st Triennial Convention will be held on Monday, August 13 through Friday, August 17, 2018 at:

**Paris-Bally's Las Vegas Hotel & Casino**  
3645 S Las Vegas Boulevard  
Las Vegas, NV 89109

There will be NO on-site registration (advance registration only), and all registration must be postmarked by July 14, 2018.

All delegates must be elected by July 14, 2018. Check your mail for complete 2018 Convention details and information. We will follow up with more information.

**AFGE**



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GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO**

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