

Riley Pushes Telework: Meets Employees Following FLRA Decision on Working From Home

NTEU73 President Rick Riley is continuing to take the lead in pushing for the ability of IRS workers to work from home.

The Chapter had filed a grievance in Innocent Spouse in Florence and won. When the IRS lost the grievance, they appealed to the Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA) but last month the FLRA affirmed the decision of the arbitrator. Now all is left is for the IRS to work out the details of setting people up in their homes so they can do the work.

"I want to make sure that any employee who has portable work and wants to work at home is given the opportunity to do that," said Mr. Riley. "This is something that IRS has agreed to do in the contract and they have even said it is in their own best interest. Without being pushed, it seems like they are just willing to go along with

the status quo. I am doing everything I can do to encourage them to go ahead and

employees would be able to do that, including customer service phone representatives and most doing paper work.

"The technology is there," added Mr. Riley. "It's just a matter of doing the work to make it happen. At times, too, there have been budget considerations. But the whole idea of this is to eventually reduce the cost of rented space so in the long run, it would even help the IRS budget. It is a win, win."



NTEU73 met with employees during a Legislative Lunch & Learn on January 30 registering them to vote and providing information.

make it happen."

Almost all employees would welcome the opportunity to work from home. Most



Chapter Finances "Excellent" According to Independent Report

NTEU73 has had the first audit done of the Chapter finances and all is well, according to independent auditor and enrolled agent Melody Walsh.

"The audit showed there were no outstanding issues, and that Chapter 73 was doing an excellent job accounting for their income and expenses," wrote Ms. Walsh in her report.

Ms. Walsh (no relation to NTEU73 VP Karen Walsh) is the proprietor of Walsh Tax Services LLC, a company NTEU73 hired to perform the independent audit.

"I reviewed the Chapter Executive Board Meetings Minutes for any unusual items

and to insure that authorization of major expenditures was approved," Ms. Walsh wrote. "No discrepancies or problems were noted."

"The Chapter has continued to improve its record keeping and is doing an excellent job of verifying and classifying expenditures," she continued.

The report was delayed coming out, because the records of the previous administration were in disarray.

If anyone would like to see a copy of the report, it is available for inspection in the union office.

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From the Desk of NTEU73 President Rick Riley

**“As always, At Your Service”
— Rick Riley**

At the close of a year it is always good to review your accomplishments and to look forward and plan for the future.

This has been a very busy year for the Chapter, we had an election and new officers were installed. This transition was seamless as my team had plans from the first day forward. The annual picnic at Stricker's Grove was wonderful. This was the year our National President Colleen Kelly retired. A new President, Tony Reardon, and new Vice President Jim Bailey were elected at the convention in August. In September Labor Recognition Day was a success. I would like to thank Tommie Braswell for all her work on the picnic and Labor Recognition Day.

Tommie's work was not over as she next prepared for the Christmas Party with the help of several of the staff, including our Vice President Karen Walsh. Just about everyone loved the Christmas Party this year. We received many compliments on having it back downtown. We also had some feedback otherwise, and that will be addressed as I thought they were valid concerns.

During that whole time' stewards were working cases. We are having a wonderful success rate due to their hard work.



I have been very busy myself, working to see things were done and working on reestablishing a working relationship with management. That at times and in areas is still a work in progress at best. In other areas, I'm proud to say we have been able to get so much done with a phone call, a meeting and a handshake. I do appreciate the effort and the cooperation management has shown. We had two audits within 90 days and the chapter was praised for its work. The Executive Board passed a balanced budget for the coming year.

Now in 2016, I see more of the same. With most of a year experience under our belts, the staff, the Executive Board and the stewards are working well together and moving this chapter forward. The focus will remain growing membership. It has been slower than I expected, but we are still working diligently and picking up new members 1 or 2 at a time. But we are growing membership.

Happy New Year, everyone! It should be a great year to come!

FREE Employee Tax Assistance is on the way!!!



(Volunteer Income Tax Assistance)

**As a campus employee, you can have your taxes
prepared FREE by IRS certified volunteers!
Appointment Line will open January 11!**

Watch the next issue for details!

Virginia Watson Elected to NTEU73 Executive Board

Virginia Watson was elected to the NTEU73 Executive Board to replace Joe Ciarimitaro who resigned his position.

After the resignation, per the NTEU73 bylaws, names are submitted to the Executive Board by the President and Executive Board members. Then during an Executive Board Meeting, a vote is taken.

Ms. Watson has been working full time in the Gateway Center union office as an administrative assistant. Her duties include tracking steward's time usage and working with standards issues.

"Virginia is a hard worker and she was the next name on the list after the election," said NTEU73 President Rick Riley. "Although it is not required, I like to take them in the order they received votes during the Chapter election. Virginia only missed being



Virginia Watson

elected by the membership by a hand full of votes."

The opening was created when Joe Ciarimitaro, a long time steward of NTEU73, resigned for personal reasons.

"Joe has really done a lot for the Chapter over the years and I wish him the best," said Mr. Riley.

Ms. Watson is a relative new steward. She ran with Mr. Riley's ticket during the past election, but has no previous experience working for the union.

"Virginia has really stepped up and is a quick learner," explained Mr. Riley. "She becomes more experienced every day and has truly become a valuable member of my staff. I was glad we could put her on the Executive Board. She is exactly the kind of person we need to help make decisions for how to run our Chapter."

NTEU Files Grievance Over Awards Settlement

NTEU recently filed a national institutional grievance alleging that the IRS has violated the parties' FY 2014 and FY 2015 Awards Settlement Agreement (Awards SA), Article 18 of the parties' 2016 National Agreement (2016 NA), and applicable National Performance Awards Agreement (NPAA) memoranda of understanding with respect to its distribution of FY 2015 awards at the beginning of November 2015.

Specifically, based on the awards data, it appears that a number of awards pools were not properly funded. The Awards SA for FY 2014 and FY 2015 require the IRS to fund awards at one percent (1%) of the total bargaining unit salaries from the prior FY (i.e., the funding of the FY 2015 awards is based on the BU salaries from FY 2014, and the funding of the FY 2014 awards was based on the BU salaries from FY 2013). Certain awards pools (for FY 2015) are significantly lower compared to the FY 2014 awards funding, even though the numbers of bargaining unit employees did not decrease at nearly the same level. Those award pools thus appear to be underfunded.

Further, there appears to be a

disproportionate decrease in the share values for certain award pools as compared to those awards pools in FY 2014, resulting in decreased performance awards for individual bargaining unit employees.

In that regard, a number of Chapter Presidents have supplied information to Tim Seidman, Negotiations Legal Specialist who is handling this for NTEU, about award pools that they believe are not accurate.

The national NTEU grievance also alleges that the agency's actions constitute a patent breach of the Awards SA, Article 18 of the 2016 NA, and the NPAA MOUs, and thus may constitute an unfair labor practice.

As a remedy, NTEU has requested that the agency cease and desist from breaching the Awards SA, appropriately fund the FY 2015 awards pools that were underfunded in violation of the Awards SA and 2016 NA, and make whole all bargaining unit employees who received a decreased award based on these violations.

"NTEU national really keeps an eye on this, as is evidenced by this grievance," commented NTEU73 President Rick

Riley. "The way awards are done was negotiated and the awards agreements were the result. It never ceases to amaze me how many times IRS negotiates and agrees to do something, and then refuses to do it. It's the same thing with the telework."

Even though the IRS agreed, the budget has been a consideration, especially when this situation involves fully funding the awards.

"With the passing of the new budget, we will have to see how this plays out," continued Mr. Riley. "Even though there have been several million more dollars allotted to the IRS, most of that money has already been earmarked to hire more customer service representatives. But if the IRS agreed to do it, in my mind they have to do it. NTEU is all over this."

Employee awards have been a perennial issue in recent years. Employees have had questions and concerns about either not getting an award or getting one that is reduced.

If you have a question concerning your award, contact the union office. NTEU73 can get you an answer!

Christmas Party is a Hit!

The NTEU73 Christmas Party was held at the Covington Convention Center on December 5 and was praised by members who attended.

"We wanted to continue the tradition of having a party and we did," said Tommie Braswell, who organized the party for the union. "We saved over \$10,000 from the previous party."

"We wanted the party close to where we work and the Convention Center was a great venue," continued Ms. Braswell.

Party goers were treated to a buffet meal that included turkey, pork, green beans, mashed potatoes and salad. Desert was peppermint cheese cake and marble chocolate cake. There was a cash bar.

"We were trying to put on a nice party without breaking the budget," said Ms. Braswell. "Last year's party cost \$27,000 and we wanted to cut that back, based on the number of people who attend."

This year, about 600 people attended with the large upstairs room nearly full.

"We wanted to have the party and also be fiscally responsible," said NTEU73 President Rick Riley. "The previous administration spent about \$135 per couple. We spent \$50 a couple and I don't think the difference was noticeable."

There was a drawing of gifts for attendees. NTEU73 gave away about 50 gifts, ranging from \$25-50. In addition, there was a disc jockey who played Christmas music during dinner and the livened things up with dancing for the last three hours.



Thomascina Braswell with some of the more than 400 toys collected to donate to the Brighten Center.

"The Convention Center was well decorated and I think most people had a very nice evening," said Mr. Riley. "Our two main social events are the Christmas Party and the picnic. They are both ways to show appreciation for the members and to give them something tangible for being members other than the normal representational duties we perform."

In addition to fun festivities, NTEU73 was able to collect over 400 toys that were donated to the Brighten Center. Attendees to the party were asked to bring a toy to donate and the response was overwhelming.

"We received a lot more gifts than I expected," said Thomascina Braswell, who organized the event for the union. "The folks at the Brighten Center were very appreciative and I am sure the kids were too!"

The Brighten Center, located in Newport, helps with unwed mothers, provides housing, helps fight drug abuse, provides day care and is engaged in many other charitable projects.

"It is great when we can turn a party into something that can help in the community and highlight the true meaning of Christmas," added Ms. Braswell. "There are going to be a lot of happy children because of our

members efforts and generosity."

"I think the party went great, overall, and I received a lot of great comments about it," said Mr. Riley. "It was a great time to get together and most people I think had a good time. I am glad we did it and could save the chapter money at the same time. It is something we are definitely planning to continue in the future."

NTEU73 Chapter Meeting!

**Wednesday,
January 20**

4:30pm

**Gateway Center
Room 505**

Open to all members!

Bed Bug Issue Resurfaces

There have been reports of bed bugs in the flat top building once again.

A story appeared in the local media (WCPO) about bed bugs at the IRS and it has created concern among employees.

Apparently, a new employee left the IRS after only two days because of the problem. However, it is not clear that more than one bed bug was actually seen in the work area. It appears that employees were discussing the issue and that is what created the concern.

Still, on December 17, IRS brought in inspectors and were unable to locate any of the creatures. This is an issue that the IRS has been very good at resolving.

"This is a major concern for a lot of employees and any time you have a building this size there are instances of these kind of things," said NTEU73 President Rick Riley. "Sometimes these situations are overblown and take on a life of their own. However, I would urge employees who have seen bed bugs to let us know and we will immediately do what we can, working with IRS management, to deal with it."

There have been several incidents with bed bugs over the years at both the flat top and the Gateway Center. IRS has hired exterminators in the past. If you see a bed bug, report it!

Washington Trip Planned for Members to Speak to Congress

NTEU73 is once again planning a bus trip to the nation's capitol in a effort to lobby Congress about important issues for federal workers.

The trip will be by bus and is free to any member who wishes to go. The trip will be in conjunction with the annual National NTEU Legislative Conference. The bus will leave at 9pm February 23rd and travels over night, arriving in Washington in the morning. It will return by about nine the next night.

Members will go to the offices of the area representative and senators. They have prepared papers to give them in an effort to educate them about employee issues.

After the meetings, there is a rally on the grounds of the capital. The NTEU

National President speaks as well a few members of Congress. Then the bus will begin the return trip.

"It is a pretty long day but people sleep on the bus and it is a lot of fun, plus we get heard by Congress, which is the best thing," said Debbie Mullikin, long time NTEU73 Legislative Coordinator, who organizes the event.

"It is always important to let Congress know about federal employee issues from our side. They certainly hear enough from people who are against federal employees!" continued Ms. Mullikin.

The trip is for members only. If you would like to go, contact NTEU73 Director of Communications Jeff Seibert to be put on the list!

Good Manager of the Month is John Roberts

"I have been here at the IRS for 6 years. I have been in DCO as a Data Transcriber. I am now in ICO in Notice Review as a Tax Examiner. I have held details in ERS and TE/GE. I have had about 10 different managers with details included.

By far, the best manager I've had is **John E. Roberts**. He was my manager for a couple seasons in Data. He was very encouraging and actually cared about his employees. He is the **ONLY** manager I've had here like this. He made sure I reached my goals here, career wise. He was always supportive and we had the best team moral. I want to be a manager here one day, and he is who I will strive to be. He deserves so much recognition for the hard work he puts in here and to his employees. I am so thankful I was able to have him as my manager."

Rainie Roy

If you would like your manager to be highlighted, send your comments to NTEU73 Director of Communication Jeff Seibert.



NTEU Chapter 73 Stewards

Day Shift:

4th Street - A. J. Allen, Dorothy Barry-Elliott, Tommie Braswell, Ron Cunningham, Kristina Fryam-Henry, Nicole Guethlein, Brenda Herrin, Bryan Jackson, Jessica Jacobs, William Kohler, Daniel McNamara, Laura Mitchell, Michelle Robinson, Michelle Ryan, Jeff Seibert.

GWC—Pat Breitenstein, **Phillip Cargile**, Steve Clark, Jamie Coffman, Tomeka Cottrell, Amanda Frazier, Loretha Hudson, Vicki King, Bob Krekeler, Staci Lee, Tonya Morris, Debbie Mullikin, Chris Pierce, Michelle Ryan, Rick Riley (**President**), John Selmeier, Melinda Smith, Debbie Steiner, Michele Townsend, Karen Walsh (**Vice President-Chief Steward**), Virginia Watson, Julia Wiley (**Secretary**).

IRRC - Florence - Miranda Antha, Jan Colwell, Sarah Corea, Michelle Hiles, Brandon Mikusa.

Swing Shift:

4th Street—Beverly Johnson, Stephanie Slayton, Torika Thompson.

GWC—William Dreier, Ron DuMoulin, Jim Gregory, Terri Hampton, Marlo Hodge-Hammond, Julie Orick, Robert Starks.

Perm Conversions in Submission Processing

One hundred and seven seasonal employees who have been working at least ten months consecutively have been converted to permanent status in Submission Processing. There have been many questions from employees about how this was done, who was eligible and how employees were selected for conversion.

If an employee works longer than 12 consecutive months the position is in actuality not a seasonal position and should be converted to a permanent one. This has been done for all employees that fell into that category.

In addition, employees who worked more than 10 consecutive months were converted. This is not something management had to do; it was optional. The departments that converted ten month employees were based on need of the agency and it was determined that these departments did not have enough permanent employees. When it was decided that some of these employees would be converted, they were chosen in

the order of the "Release-Recall" list.

On the "Release-Recall List" employees are given a number ranking. They are called back to work and laid off according to their ranking on the list.

While seniority is a factor in ranking the employees, it is not the only one. Skill codes and the department one works in is also considered. This is why, at times, senior employees were not selected and newer employees were. The decisions were not made based on Enter-On-Duty (EOD) dates.

"This is why it is important for employees to get as many skill codes as possible," said NTEU73 Rick Riley. "I was very happy that management decided to convert these folks. Many of them were virtually permanent anyway. But this guarantees they will be in work status all year."

Mr. Riley appointed long time steward Pat Breitenstein and Thomascina Braswell to handle issues regarding the conversions, including answering employee questions.

"Any time something like this is

implemented, there can be mistakes made," explained Mr. Riley. "If you feel as though you were improperly passed over, contact the union. We can work to get these types of situations resolved."

Several employees have already been in contact with the union with questions and issues.

"We are working them all," said Mr. Riley. "It seems like most of the questions are about why someone was not selected. As I said, it goes by the release recall list. Because of that, it can sometimes seem unfair when an employee with less seniority is converted and someone with more seniority is not." "Overall, this is a great thing," added Mr. Riley.

"Employees, because of the budget, have not been given as much opportunity as in the past," he added. "The IRS has not been doing a lot of backfilling of positions recently and I am glad we can put a lot of people's minds at rest, knowing that they will be able to count on working all year! It's a good thing!"

60 Second Updates

Pay Raise Finalized Minutes after the last issue of *The Force* went to print, the exact amount of locality pay was announced. In the Cincinnati area, the amount of Locality Pay increase will be 1.18% which is slightly less than the 1.3% reported last month.



NTEU pushes for more IRS funding-- NTEU is urging House and Senate appropriations committees to provide higher levels of funding for the IRS this year. NTEU National President sent letters to the leaders of both appropriations committees to remind them that IRS' funding has been cut by almost \$1.2 billion in the past five years, a 17 percent cut after adjusting for inflation. The agency also has lost 18,000 full-time and part-time employees over that five-year period.

"The lack of sufficient staffing has

strained IRS' capacity to meet its mission of providing America's taxpayers top quality service and enforcing our nation's tax laws," Reardon wrote. "The drastic cuts to IRS' budget come at a time when the IRS workforce is already facing a dramatically increasing workload with staffing levels down more than 31 percent below what they were just 19 years ago."

OPM Data Breach Letters

Letters informing employees about the second of two data breaches have begun to be sent out. They will go out for twelve weeks and the mailing began on September 30. Employees will receive a letter from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) telling them that their information may have been breached when the system involving background checks was compromised. Information about the breaches and what you should do, even if you were affected, can be found at the OPM website.

Leave Tracking Sheets

The cards that NTEU issues so that employees can track their leave have not yet been received in the union offices.

However, if you want one, you can go on the NTEU.org website and download one. They will be able to be picked up in the union office when they become available.

Parity Between Parking/Transit Benefit

Separate legislation that will be considered separately deals with tax extenders. This bill provides for permanent parity between parking and transit commuter benefits. The benefit would be capped at \$250 per month for 2015 and \$255 per month for 2016 for both parking and transit.

Currently, the parking exclusion is \$250 per month, and in recent years, the transit monthly amount has been \$130. The language would apply this tax change retroactively as of January 1, 2015 and for all future years.

Excise Tax Delayed

This funding measure defers the start of the so-called Cadillac tax on certain health insurance plans by two years—to 2020 instead of 2018 as called for under current law. NTEU supports the delay, which gives the union more time to work to protect the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP).

Budget Passes for FY2016: IRS Budget Increased

Congress passed and President Obama has approved a budget for fiscal year 2016 and have averted another government shutdown. The IRS budget was set at \$11.2 billion which is an increase of \$290 million. This increase is targeted for areas of IRS that directly affects taxpayers.

"Your pay, benefits and due process rights could have been directly targeted in the omnibus but were not," said NTEU President Tony Reardon in a memo to union members.

Also included in the bill was a 1.3% increase in pay which will take effect in January.

"While NTEU will continue advocating for higher pay raises in the future, we are pleased that this raise, which was the first locality adjustment in six years, was not blocked by Congress," Mr. Reardon added.

The measure also includes an NTEU sponsored requirement for the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to provide credit monitoring and ID theft protection to individuals affected by the recent data breaches for ten years. OPM had originally

agreed to only three years of this protection.

"It's the first time in six years the IRS has received any significant increase in funding," said IRS Commissioner John A. Koskinen in a message to IRS employees. "It's important to note that our yearly fixed costs, such as salary increases and rent charges, go up \$300 million a year," he warned.

That means that most, if not all, of the increase in the IRS budget will be eaten up by the annual increases in costs. In addition, the rest it targeted for specific areas in the IRS by Congress.

"Congress has directed us to spend some of the additional funds to provide more service for taxpayers," continued Mr. Koskinen. "For example, it will allow us to hire up to 1,000 staff to help taxpayers with their phone questions. We are immediately beginning the hiring process."

The Commissioner expects these new employees to be on board by the middle of the tax season. He also said that the new funds will help expand the seasonal

workforce.

However, Mr. Koskinen does not think even this increased funding is enough.

"Given we have urgent needs in every part of the IRS, keep in mind this budget is simply not large enough to address all of them," he explained. "However, at the same time, I can assure you, we do not anticipate any furlough days in 2016."

"The passing of this budget ends the anxiety and nervousness caused by the threat of another government shutdown," continued Mr. Reardon. "Congress provided a full year of funding for all agencies, taking shutdowns off the table until October 1, 2016."

"What this really means is that we are fully funded for the next eight months," commented NTEU73 President Rick Riley. "Then the entire process starts again. A budget will have to be passed before the presidential election, so we will all see how it plays. It could be that we will be hearing more shutdown threats at that time. It seems like it is the way of life here at IRS."

NTEU73 Stewards Working for the Members

Your NTEU Stewards work for you, and are available if not in person, by phone or email. There are multiple stewards located in most Cincinnati IRS Center location. Here is a list of stewards manning the current NTEU73 offices:

Gateway:

- ◆ Chapter President **Rick Riley**
- ◆ Vice President/Chief Steward **Karen Walsh**
- ◆ National Vice President **Debbie Mullikin**
- ◆ Chief of Staff **Steve Clark**
- ◆ Secretary **Julia Wiley**
- ◆ Stewards **Virginia Watson** and **Debbie Mullikin**
- ◆ Night Shift Chief Steward **Bill Drier**
- ◆ Night Shift Steward **Julie Orick**

Fourth Street Center (Flat-top):

- ◆ Stewards **Michelle Robinson**, **Tommie Braswell** and **Bev Johnson** (Night Shift).
- ◆ Treasurer **Laura Mitchell**
- ◆ Director of Communications **Jeff Seibert**

If you have any issues or concerns, call an NTEU73 office at 859-669-5700 or 859-669-5370.

Sarah Corea won back-pay for an employee for performing higher graded duties.

Bill Dreier got a sick leave restriction letter removed!

Marlo Hodge-Hammond got a 3 day suspension reduced to an admonishment!

Bev Johnson got an evaluation raised from 3.2 to 3.8!

Daniel McNamara got an employee's evaluation raised from a 3.0 to 3.8! He also won an employee the ability to work credit hours with back hours granted after being wrongfully denied the ability to work credit hours.

Chris Pierce got a disclosure error removed to raise an employee's evaluation to all fives!

Michelle Robinson helped an employee with their retirement.

Pat Breitenstein and **Tommie Braswell** have been handling issues regarding conversions.

Virginia Watson has been handling TEPS issues. She has also been keeping track of union stewards time!
