

The Force

Return To Office Equipment

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covid “normalized” for many of us, working from home, and triggered many frequent telework-related conversations with management. Recently, during a discussion about telework and non-telework schedules, management emphasized that employees working from home and returning to the office are required to bring all necessary equipment to and from home each time. They also announced that those employees would allow be allowed to purchase, at their own expense, IRS approved equipment for their work from home set up, including but not limited to monitors, headphones, and keyboard and mouse sets. This conversation triggered a lot of questions about “IRS APPROVED EQUIPMENT.” The terms that would be applied in requesting approval for any personally purchased IRS equipment can be found in IRM 10.8.1.3.1.19.1, Personally Owned and Other Non-Government Furnished Equipment, which, under Paragraph 5(d) states the following:

On Friday, March 13, 2020, our lives changed as we knew it. Headlines of covid spread throughout news outlets and social media like wildfire. It was when most of us working parents/guardians were notified that for the safety of our children, they would remain at home for a couple days. A couple days turned into a few weeks, then months, and now, more than two years. Covid has since wreaked havoc on our entire lives, including our ability to safely work building. During those critical times, our great Union fought for our rights and ensured that ad hoc telework would be available to perform our job functions for tasks deemed appropriate, at home. Our ability to adapt and succeed during these unprecedented times opened the eyes of many nay-sayers, and our great Union leaders were able to negotiate and expand telework under the National Agreement.

As we transitioned into our new covid-era lifestyles,

(Continued on page 2)

Additional Positions Eligible for Frequent Telework

NTEU continues to push for a meeting with the IRS for the purpose of pursuing adding additional occupations that should be presumptively eligible for frequent telework (that were not added to the new Exhibit 50-2, which contains the updated list of occupations). IRS has agreed to set up a meeting to discuss this in the near future.

In the meantime, NTEU73 is pursuing Telework Reconsideration Requests. If you were denied Frequent or Recurring Telework or your preferred in-office day, please contact us at the Chapter email address ctr.cov.cirsc.nteu.73.covington@irs.gov

(Continued)

To allow IRS employees, while working at an approved telework or other authorized location(s), to connect a personally owned wired keyboard, mouse, headphone, external speaker and/or docking station/port replicator to his/her government-furnished laptop if the following requirements are met:

1. The peripheral device shall be wired. Wireless devices are prohibited unless acquired in accordance with IRM 10.8.26.3.16.10, Wireless System Components.
2. The wired keyboard, mouse, headphone, external speaker and docking station/port replicator has not been plugged into a public computer kiosk or non-trusted computer.
3. The above peripheral devices must not have any additional built-in storage capacity. Any type of volatile or non-volatile memory capabilities that could possibly allow for injection of malware or have ability to save or capture into memory; device signals, keystrokes, etc. that could pose a security vulnerability, are not allowed.

I, for one, think there are so many exciting advantages to purchasing equipment for your home office. While it is going to squeeze into my fun money, in the long run, it will be so worth it. For starters, I am not a fan of the headphone set assigned to us by IRS. Now let's be honest here. You are going to forget something at some point at least once (daily, if you're me), and not having to unload/load, set up and take down equipment to and from home, is going to be a time saver and an extra 15-30 minutes of sleep in the morning. So, if you plan to get your own equipment, please keep the above IRM in mind when making those home office equipment purchases.

Your management will be the appropriate one to assist you if you do have any additional questions or for final approval. And please remember that Union stewards are happy to assist you, if you have run into any issues or have any questions regarding your purchases and as we transition back to the building.

Rachel Lovins

Employee Tax Compliance (ETC)

NTEU raised concerns about employees impacted by the backlog of returns not yet processed. We raised with the IRS concerns about employees receiving employee tax compliance notices as well as those who are unable to enter an installment agreement because their paper tax returns have not been processed. The IRS shared that submission processing is currently working 2021 returns and asked for examples of employees who are still waiting for their paper tax returns to be processed. If you have been contacted by the ETC because your return (s) was not processed or are waiting on the processing of a return so you can establish an installment agreement, please send those specifics to Steward Shonda Collins for forwarding to National NTEU so we can have the IRS research these issues.

Childcare Subsidy Program

NTEU asked the IRS for an update on its efforts to comply with Article 56 of the 2022 National Agreement and begin paying eligible employees the childcare subsidies they are due. You may recall that NTEU filed a national grievance over the IRS's failure to timely get this program up and running, and as part of the grievance have requested that all eligible employees be granted retroactive subsidies to January 2022. The parties had agreed to a January 1, 2022, start date of the subsidies to afford a vendor time to get the program in place. In one positive development, OPM has approved the IRS request to offer a one-time retroactive childcare subsidy payment to eligible employees. This will take some time to establish and will likely coincide with the launch of the program. The IRS continues to vet vendors and should have an update in the next two weeks. When a contract is awarded, the program will be launched, and an open window period established for employees to apply. Please keep documentation of your dependent care expenses.

Employee Referral Bonus Program (ERBP)



Many of you might have heard about the Employee Referral Bonus Program (ERBP) and would like to take advantage of receiving extra cash. As with many programs, before signing up, you always want to make sure you read the fine print.

To be eligible for an ERBP award, referring employees must meet the following criteria:

1. Be a covered employee and not fall into any of the exclusions
2. Be on the IRS' rolls when the candidate is referred, as of the candidate's entrance on duty (EOD), and at the time the award is made
3. Must clear the misconduct and tax compliance screening prior to the payment of the award.
4. Must have referred an individual who is not considered a relative
5. A referring employee who retires prior to the candidate's EOD will still be eligible for the ERBP award, so long as the referring employee was employed by the IRS on the date the candidate submitted their application.

You will only get a referral bonus if you refer someone into a "hard-to-fill" position. Hard-to-fill positions are those the IRS is having difficulty recruiting candidates for without incentive. The IRS defines hard to fill positions as positions that the Agency is having difficulty recruiting competent and qualified candidates for without offering incentives.

Once you refer someone into one of these hard-to-fill positions, you will receive an ERBP award in the amount of \$500. You will receive the first \$250 on the referred employee's six-month anniversary, and the second \$250 on that person's one-year anniversary with the Agency.

If you choose to refer someone or would like more information, a list of the current designated hard-to-fill positions is available on the [ERBP SharePoint Application](#). The site also has information on how to make a referral and provide a list of approved hard-to-fill positions.

Angela Moore

STEWARDS' CORNER

Your NTEU Stewards are here to fight for you! We are available in person, by phone, email, or skype!

GATEWAY STEWARDS

President:

Debbie Mullikin

Vice President:

Chris Pierce

Secretary/Chief Steward:

Shannon Lovins

Day Shift Full Time Stewards:

Loretha Hudson, Rachel Lovins,
Angela Moore

Day Shift Part Time Stewards:

Tonya Morris, Nicole Guethlein,
Jennifer Smith, Hope Osborne, Thomas
Bayer, Brandi Riggs, Shonda Collins,
Nichole Williams, Alistar Blair

Swing Shift Chief Steward:

Alex Walker

Swing Shift Part Time Stewards:

Brandy Belew

ISO BUILDING

Treasurer/Full Time Steward:

Janet Colwell

NTEU EMAIL

ctr.cov.cirsc.nteu.73.covington@irs.gov

Outside Employment (EO)

Outside Employment (OE) is employment or business activities that are performed separate from your IRS duties or position. IRS employees may engage in outside employment if doing so would not pose a conflict of interest with your duties and responsibilities as an IRS employee, and if you have received prior approval from management to engage in that business activity.

If you would like to request approval of an outside employment, you will need to submit a request under Article 6 of the contract. If your request complies with the rules, you may participate in permitted OE activities if such activities are performed outside your IRS hours or in a pre-approved leave status. Once you decide to have OE, you will need to submit the request at least 10 workdays before accepting or starting a permitted Outside Employment position. You will need to add your request to the Outside Employment System in HR Connect.

There are some outside activities that are not permitted that you are going to want to steer clear of. IRS employees may not participate in activities concerning: (1) the performing of legal services involving Federal, State, and local tax matters; (2) appearing on behalf of any taxpayer before any Federal, State, or local governmental agency in an action involving a tax matter (except with the written authorization of the Commissioner), (3) engaging in accounting or bookkeeping, (4) preparing tax returns for compensation, gifts, or favor, and representing another before any agency or court in connection with a matter in which the United States is a party or has a direct and substantial interest in the matter, unless permitted by an exception found in 18 U.S.C. Section 205.

Before taking on outside employment, please be sure to speak with your manager or read the Ethics handbook.

Loretha Hudson

Status of the Various Surge Initiatives

NTEU asked the IRS about the status of its efforts to draw down the backlog of inventory and cases in Accounts Management (AM) and Submission Processing (SP), and whether those efforts are on track to conclude by the end of this FY (Sept. 30, 2022). W&I indicated that the surge actions are working and the inventory is going down, more so in AM than SP. The agency stated it is too early to assess whether it will have completed all of the work that it planned to complete by September 30, 2022, but indicated it will have a better picture of the status by mid-July. The IRS will update us at that time. We pointed out that some Campus chapters are advising us that there is “paper stored everywhere” in the Campuses — and it is causing some concern among employees. W&I responded that any paper that is out in the open are cases that have already been worked; and only employees with the proper authorizations have access to these areas. They are waiting for the Federal Records Center (FRC) to be able to take shipment of such files. The FRC had been mostly non-operational during much of the pandemic, and only recently began operating again.

Rise in COVID-19 Cases and Return to Work (June 25)

NTEU raised employees’ concerns about the rise of COVID transmission rates and the plans to return employees to the office. NTEU asked whether the IRS was considering pushing back the June 25, RTO for Phase II or continuing maximum telework per the parties’ MOU beyond that date. The IRS indicated there are currently no discussions underway to push the June 25 RTO date back or to extend the maximum telework policy beyond June 25. It pointed out that 90 percent of the IRS workforce is “fully vaccinated” per CDC guidelines and the agency plans to continue with existing safety protocols.

We also raised concerns about the lack of space to properly socially distance in some areas. The IRS said that the current CDC guidelines only require that employees who are not vaccinated to be socially distanced from others. The IRS also stated that it has been working with Treasury to waive the two-day reporting per pay period for employees who are either high risk themselves or live with a family member who is high risk. The agency indicated that it will begin processing requests for temporary hardships for such employees, based on a “temporary hardship exception process.” In that regard, we recently began bargaining over conditions for employees beyond the June 25 RTO date, which will include additional flexibilities, and returning employees to the field.

2022 National Agreement Commentaries



This will be Part 2 of my review of the new National Agreement, which went into effect last fall. A copy of the new Contract will be printed and given to each employee in the unit by the em-

ployer. As of the date of this issue of The Force, the Contract has not been printed and delivered to the employees. However, you can access an electronic copy of the Contract here:

<http://core.publish.no.irs.gov/docs/pdfld11678--2021-10-00.pdf>

Although I encourage everyone to learn the ins and outs of the Contract, some of the Articles that you should definitely be sure to read and review are as follows:

Article 11, Section 21, Online Communications

This Article states that, “[t]he Employer may require employees to use webcams for individual or group meetings, including training, where face to face meetings are warranted, but impractical.”

Article 12, Performance Appraisal System

This Article is your IRS report card. How well you do on your Annual Appraisal determines if you are qualified for raises and an annual award. There could be other factors that may disqualify you for an award. However, you must have received an overall rating of a 3.0 to get a step increase or a lateral raise.

Article 12 outlines all the different appraisals you can receive. Your annual appraisal is based on your measured critical job elements (CJE). Section 4 (B) 6 states: “During the final thirty (30) days of an employee’s annual appraisal period (or otherwise agreed upon) the employee may prepare a written self-assessment on a form to be provided by the Employer to submit for their supervisor’s consideration.” The Employer will maintain a web-based tutorial. As stated above, this is only voluntary. It is your career, and no one cares more about your future than you do. It may be worth the time you put into writing your self-assessment. Article 12 is eighteen (18) pages long and it talks about annual, departure, and merit promotion appraisals. It is important that you read the entire Arti-

cle. I recently completed the ITM Course 77767 (Performance Management Policy for Employees), which effectively summarized Article 12, and is a mandatory course. There is also a Course to help you prepare your self-assessment. The last page of Article 12 is a chart that gives you the due date of your annual performance appraisal according to the last digit of your social security number.

Article 13-Promotions/Other Competitive Actions

Article 13 talks about job selections, temporary job promotions, and exceptions to the rules. Section 1(B) states that, “[t]he employer will provide first consideration to IRS employees for its bargaining unit vacancies, except as otherwise provided for in this Article, by considering the Best Qualified (BQ) candidates at all grade levels.” As an IRS employee you may apply for jobs internally and externally. Always pay close attention to the job qualification section because there are action words that need to be part of your job application that can help you make the BQ list. If you do make the BQ list and are given an interview, it is a good idea to get a mock interview from a member of management in your current area prior to your actual interview. The constructive feed back you receive is very helpful. I wish you the best of luck finding the career that you love in the government. As Mark Twain stated, “find the job you enjoy doing, and you never work a day in your life.”

Article 14-Release/Recall Procedures

This applies to our seasonal and career conditional employees. The most important thing to remember here is if there are seasonal and career conditional employees in the same area, the career conditional employees will be released first and will return to work after the seasonal employees have been recalled. The ranking of employees will be accomplished by a combination of performance and entry on duty date. In Article 14 there is an equation that is used for the ranking determination.

Article 15-Reassignments/Realignments and Voluntary Relocations

I will start with Section 2-Involuntary Reassignments/Realignments. If there are more volunteers than needed, the employee(s) with the earliest IRS EOD will be reassigned/realigned. When there are not enough volunteers, the least senior employee(s) using the IRS EOD, will be reassigned/realigned. The designated employees will receive five (5) workdays notice. Reassignment/Realignment from one POD to another POD. When enough employee volunteer, a fifteen (15) day notice will be given. If there are not enough volunteers, a thirty (30) day notice will be given. These employees will be given moving expenses according to the law. I will now move to Section 5-Permanent Hardship Relocation through Vacancy Process. The employer can offer relocation if there is a vacant position which the Employer intends to fill in the employee's current job series and the employee meets the position and skill requirements. Situations may arise where the Employer may attempt to accommodate a hardship by offering a position in another series when it is determined by the Employer that the employee is minimally qualified for the position, can readily perform the work, and there is no vacancy in the employee's current series, provided there is no hardship eligible employee currently in the series being considered. Section 6-Voluntary Relocation. Volunteers for relocation within their current business divisions are eligible for realignment to positions at their current grade, series, work schedule and specialty, if any. The opportunity to apply for voluntary relocation will be announced annually Service-wide no later than January 5 and remain open through July 20. Section 8 is Job Swaps. Many of us remember the RIF and our Flat Top Building closing. The contract refers to employees in the same occupational classification series, with the same work schedule and some specialty area. If you swap positions with another employee, you may not swap again for three (3) years. Section 9- Temporary Hardship. When an employee is experiencing a temporary hardship, the employee may request a temporary Telework arrangement. The Employer will make every reasonable effort to approve a temporary Telework location, including another IRS POD, to accommodate the temporary hardship. The mileage requirement (200 miles) of Article 50 of this Agreement for the location of a Telework site is temporarily waived, and the requirement to report to the assigned POD at least two (2) days each pay period or, if the work location varies on a recurring basis,

regularly perform work within the commuting area of the POD, is temporarily waived. The Employer may approve temporary hardship for various periods of up to one (1) year depending on the specific circumstances of the hardship, subject to staffing and workload needs. Management may extend the temporary hardship for up to one (1) additional year. The Application for Hardship Reassignment/ Relocation Request is on the following page. NOTE: Any type of Hardship Relocation does not entitle the employee moving expenses.

Well, that is all I have for Part Two of my long journey through the new contract. Join me for my new adventure next month beginning with Article 16.

Janet Colwell

Eligibility for the Special Act Awards

Every employee who is currently working in AM, including IDTVA, who has worked there for at least two pay periods between February 27, 2022 and September 30, 2022 will receive a SAA. This means both the employees who were specifically detailed back to AM for the Surge and those who are in AM essentially working in support of the Surge, will be granted the SAA.

Every employee who is currently working in SP who has worked there for at least two pay periods between April 11, 2022 and September 30, 2022 will receive a SAA. Again, this means both employees who were assigned to work the Surge from SB/SE or other divisions and the current SP employees will be granted an SAA.

Part-time and seasonal employees meeting this criterion will also be granted an SAA.

The IRS acknowledged that **every** employee working in AM and SP, whether on phones or paper, are all working tirelessly on the backlog or in support of addressing the backlog, providing invaluable assistance to fix problems that they did not create.

Thanks to our members , their families and even some retirees, we had another successful Memorial Day event at Stricker's Grove!



NTEU SUMMER

Organized to Win

MEMBERSHIP CAMPAIGN

⚙️ The 2022 Summer Membership Campaign will run from May 8, 2022, through September 24, 2022.

💰 An incentive of \$50 will be paid to each new member that completes and turns in the form 1187 during the campaign period. If you are a member and recruit a non-member to join you can get \$25 for each recruit. They need to put your name at the bottom of the for 1187.

🕒 Incentives will only be paid for new members who have not been a member of NTEU within the past year.

Retirement Assistance for Federal Employees

Planning for your retirement starts the day you begin your career, but the path to retirement differs for everyone. Depending on your age, years in service, and needs, your retirement strategy will change to suit your situation.

While planning your retirement, you'll have to make irrevocable decisions. That's why it's so important to understand your options.

Retirement Support

- Assisting with Retirement Paperwork and/or the GRB Platform
- Setting Retirement Goals
- Understanding Options Before and After Retirement
- Creating a Budget
- TSP and 401(k) Strategies
- IRA Options to Fit Your Goals
- Survivor Annuity Options
- Maximizing Your Pension
- Social Security Strategy
- Calculating Your Retirement Date

Schedule a One-on-One Retirement Review

Paul & Roxie Thornton
paul@unitedbenefits.com
Call: 423-309-2758

Christopher Lee
chris@unitedbenefits.com
Call/Text: 256-740-2166



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866-558-2121
www.unitedbenefits.com