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THE GUARDIAN



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Day's Work

Employee Tax Compliance

Employee Tax Compliance (ETC) issues are one of the most common reasons NTEU members visit the NTEU office. Every year, many employees at the Andover Campus receive a letter from Employee Tax Compliance at the IRS notifying them that there is an issue with one or more of the federal tax returns they have filed within the past several years. The agency considers it to be a very serious issue when an employee has an ETC issue, because as IRS employees we are held to a higher standard when it comes to timely and accurately filing tax returns. If you receive an ETC letter informing you of any issues with one or more of your federal tax returns, you should immediately take the following steps:

1. Respond to the ETC letter with an explanation. Whether it was a simple mistake, or your CPA accidentally omitted a form, or you simply need to investigate the matter further, **RESPOND TO THE LETTER!**
2. Pay whatever additional tax liability has been assessed and fix the problem with the return(s). File an amended return ASAP with all the changes necessary to correct the return(s).
3. Notify your manager that you received the letter, responded to the letter, and made the necessary corrections. Some folks will argue that you should never “turn yourself in to management”. The fact is, you will not be incriminating yourself. Management will not take any action until they receive a letter from ETC. No disciplinary action will be based on your account of an ETC issue, and we have a stronger argument to make in your favor if you notified management as soon as you became aware of the situation.
4. Talk to an NTEU steward about the situation, because once ETC closes the case, they will be sending it to your management. You will be interviewed about the ETC issue, and you will be entitled to NTEU representation.

ETC consequences can be severe, and every year employees are terminated for ETC related issues. It is important to communicate with your chapter leaders any time ETC issues arise.

Sincerely, Robert MacFarlane, NTEU Chapter Officer & Chief Steward (Nights)

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Stewards Working For You



What is Leave Restriction? Leave Restriction is a status that results from suspected leave abuse. Employees are generally notified in writing and placed in this status not to exceed six (6) months. They are notified of specific leave-requesting procedures, which must be followed during this status. Any violation of such procedure will result in an AWOL charge. Leave Restriction is for employees that abuse the leave system. Not for employees whom have a chronic illness and run out of FMLA and leave. Sick leave restriction letters will be based on an employee's absences due to alleged illnesses. Sick leave restriction letters will not be based on an employee's use of approved annual leave (not including annual in lieu of sick leave) or leave approved under the Family Medical Leave Act. Employees on sick leave restriction letters may request annual leave and Family Medical Leave under the applicable Articles of this Agreement. The employee may be placed on leave restriction after verbal counseling. There is a process before being placed on leave restriction: 1. Verbal Counseling 2. Written Counseling 3. Leave Restriction

Leave Restriction can be extended for just reason. Leave Restriction can lead to an employee removal from services: 1. AWOL 2. Disciplinary Actions 3. Removal from Service.

Question: *Can I be placed on sick leave restriction for using too much sick leave?*

Answer: The use of sick leave should be used appropriately and, in most cases, infrequently. You can be given a leave restriction letter if you are found to be using your sick leave frequently or in unusual patterns (the day after every holiday). If you find you are using sick leave frequently, you should speak with NTEU to see your options.

Question: *If I am on sick leave restriction, how long will it last?* **Answer:** The restriction must be reviewed at least every six months, and a written decision to continue or lift the restriction must be issued. If there is improvement, the restriction should be lifted. You may request to have the restriction reviewed at any time.

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Stewards Working For You, *Cont'd*



I'm on
SICK LEAVE

Question: If I call in sick, may the supervisor question me about the nature of my illness? **Answer:** The supervisor may NOT ask you any personal particulars about your illness. The only information you are required to provide is the fact that you are requesting sick leave and your expected date of return to work. (See Article 34, Section 3C).

Question: Do I need a Doctor's note if I am out sick more than three days? **Answer:** Yes. Per the stipulations of the leave restriction letter, even if it's a simple headache, you must provide a doctor's note. The provision under Article 34 Section 3A which states that you may be required to furnish a doctor's note if you exceed 3 consecutive workdays of calling in sick, does not apply if you are subjected to a leave restriction letter. The only exception to this is if you are on FMLA. Approved FMLA is not subject to this provision and you will not be required to provide a doctor's note.

Leave restriction letters in such cases where a supervisor believes that an employee is using sick leave inappropriately, the supervisor should be asking the employee about their pattern. Absent a reasonable explanation, a counseling will occur. After the counseling, if the pattern continues, a leave restriction letter could be furnished. A leave restriction letter will articulate the exact process the employee must follow to request leave. Employees who find that their patterns of use are increasing or if they believe they may need FMLA, they should immediately contact NTEU so we can discuss options. NTEU needs to be involved prior to the leave restriction letter to help. Often times employees come to NTEU after they receive the leave restriction letter and it's only then that we are able to tell them that they have an FMLA condition that, if filed properly, could have prevented the leave restriction letter. Always seek out NTEU guidance if you get spoken to by your manager about leave. *Article 34, Section 4*



Know your rights. NTEU-represented employees who encounter workplace problems or issues have an ally in their NTEU steward. This trained union representative can help resolve or alleviate your situation, or fight it with a grievance, if necessary. Look for the "NTEU Flag", to seek your Steward or visit the union office.



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Doubter's Corner

We don't need to be Members this year because I got my 3.1% Pay Raise & 12 Weeks of Paid Parental Leave! Don't be fooled! NTEU fought long & hard for YOU!

NTEU was successful in securing an average 3.1 percent pay increase for federal employees (a 2.6 percent across-the-board pay increase and 0.5 percent increase toward locality pay rates) and the historic passing of a paid parental leave program providing 12 weeks of paid time to spend with a new child.

That said, we can never predict what the Agency or Congress will do. At the National level, NTEU needs continuous support from members to maintain the clout required to protect federal employees' rights.

Each and every member counts and is important to NTEU. And equally important is the fact that every federal agency knows how many NTEU members are in the bargaining unit. It's that number that determines NTEU's bargaining strength, the power of our voice, and our ability to protect the jobs of federal workers.

Just in time for Valentine's Day, here's a sweetheart of a deal: For about \$7.50 a week for new employees. This amount will vary by grade and locality so check your chapter dues chart for the average biweekly dues rate to determine your chapter's per week amount. Join your co-workers by filling out the 1187 and helping us to make the workplace even better.

Together we are stronger.

Together we are stronger.



NTEU



FEDERAL EMPLOYEES

TODAY & EVERYDAY!

NTEU
The National Treasury Employees Union



Social media is everywhere. But there is actually one place you can - and should – get away from social media: the federal workplace. While work is not the place for social media, social media also is certainly not the place for work. That means the posting of work-related content on your Facebook page, Twitter feed or other social media account comes with inherent risk and may even be a violation of agency policy.

That said, the use of technology is on the rise, both for personal and business reasons, and growing at a very fast pace! Federal employees are not exempt from this worldwide trend. Until recent years conduct cases involving employee use of technology were rare, but they are increasing.

There are two primary types of discipline cases that NTEU-represented employees have encountered, such as actions based on alleged violations of agency internet and email policies, and actions for employee participation in social media such as Facebook. *(Fun-Factoid: How many are on Facebook at all? How about Twitter? Wikipedia shows that 53% of Americans are on Facebook).*

Here are some do's and don'ts for avoiding unwanted workplace problems.



Best Practices

- Do pause before you post. Understand that when it comes to the Internet, almost nothing is private. What goes online, stays online, often indefinitely.
- Do present yourself in a professional manner at all times, even when engaged in social media activities for personal reasons.
- Do monitor your social media pages and security settings regularly. Material posted by others can reflect poorly on you. On Facebook, you can approve certain items posted about you.
- Do build a rapport with someone before adding them as a “friend” to your social media site.
- Do separate fact from opinion. Be sure your audience knows the difference.
- Do friend NTEU! Join us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter to get news, photos, calls to action and links to videos.

What Not To Do



- Don't access social media sites for personal use while on duty or using agency equipment or unless you are certain that your employer's limited personal use policy allows it.
- Don't expect privacy in your electronic work systems, emails or mobile devices.
- Don't mix your personal online activity with your professional activity.
- Don't publish internal agency business or confidential and proprietary information.
- Don't disclose private facts about someone else without their permission. Libel and privacy laws apply to online activity.
 - Don't post pictures of yourself, or your colleagues, while wearing federal uniforms unless you are confident that there is nothing on the page that would bring you, and by extension, the agency, into disrepute.
 - Don't post pictures of your work space, or confiscated contraband, online or tag colleagues in unflattering pictures.
 - Don't use profanity, ethnic or racial slurs or otherwise obscene language.





Why did I become a Chapter Steward? At the time I was working in the Fitchburg Submission and Processing Data Entry Department. We did not have a steward on the nightshift, and we needed one. I inquired and I was told no one had stepped up for the task. At that point, I volunteered and began Steward Training. I currently work in AUR. I have been with AUR since it began. Prior to AUR, I was in Data Entry, SP. I have been with the IRS since 2002.

What advice would you give BU employees? Do not let management intimidate you. You are never alone! You have NTEU beside you. The union is always ready to stand up for you.

Do you have a memorable experience as a Chapter Steward? My first grievance was for a member's annual appraisal. The manager had written inappropriate information that was irrelevant to the employee's job performance. I expressed that this information was irrelevant and not warranted for annual appraisal. NTEU won the grievance and hence statements were removed. The employee's CJE was raised and the member was able to receive their cash award.

Why should BU Employees join NTEU? It's hard enough dealing with the rules and regulations surrounding our jobs and it can be even harder when a BU member experiences bullying or ill treatment. If a BU member become a target of bullying, my advice is to keep a log of all the incidences, dates and any witnesses. If you become a target, you should immediately contact a steward or the union for advice. They will help you deal with the situation and give you all the options that may be available to help your situation. **NTEU is your support system and can help you!**

Stewards are key to building our union. Being a steward means stepping up to play a key role in building our union. While not always an easy job, the role of a steward can be deeply rewarding—and something to be proud of. The role of the union steward is a key "link" in our union. As a steward, they make collective bargaining agreements meaningful by helping implement our contract and defend members' rights on a day-to-day basis. They are in the best position to understand members' concerns and priorities, organize with them to act, and communicate priorities to chapter union leaders. They are also the best person to educate members about our union's goals. Our most important job is to build an active, united membership in our workplace. Our ability to defend and improve conditions will always depend on the collective power of our membership. **We are always more powerful together.**

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Congressional Site Visit

Most recently, Chapter 68 Leaders met with Claire Teylouni, Regional Director, from Senator Markey's Boston District office. We gave her a site tour of Andover which is a great way to inform legislators about the importance of the work we do everyday. Additionally, site visits provide legislators with the chance to experience the dedication and enthusiasm of federal workers who are making a difference in the lives of American Taxpayers.

IRS employees collect money that runs our government and allows America to function, grow and prosper. The IRS is one of the world's most efficient tax administrators, collecting more than 93 percent of all government revenue, and it does so at a lower cost than any other industrialized nation. IRS employees apply the nation's tax laws fairly, helping taxpayers meet their tax responsibilities in a fair and consistent manner.

We discussed the importance of Federal Workers' Collective Bargaining Rights and Union Rights, providing competitive pay to federal workers so our federal government can continue to recruit and retain the most talented workforce and providing sufficient funding to ensure agencies can meet their missions and perform the essential work they do for the American public.

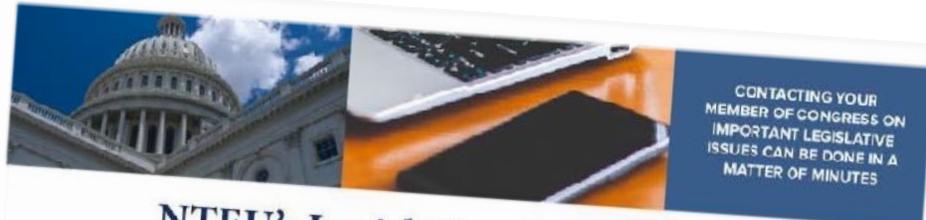


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Note: Do not use government computer. Use home computer, personal email, phone and tablet. Must be done on your time.

Participation in the Chapter's Legislative Letter Writing Grassroots Contest entails you emailing letters on Key Action Alerts to your respective local members of congress. The prizes are awarded to those who have the highest number of emailed letters!



NTEU's Legislative Action Center

Send an email from your computer, phone or tablet.

1. Go to action.nteu.org
2. Choose an action alert (from computer)
3. Click 'Take Action' button (tablet or phone)
4. Fill in the contact information and click 'Remember Me'
5. Submit

When there is a call alert, call quickly.

1. Select the call alert
2. Fill in contact information (unless you've previously clicked 'Remember Me')
3. Call the numbers provided and use the talking points on the page
4. Fill in call feedback
5. Submit





Valentine's Day Cookie Recipes

Show your love with heart-shaped sugar cookies, truffles and kisses and other Valentine's Day cookie favorites.



Valentine Sandwich Cookies

Ingredients

- 1 cup butter
- 1 1/2 cups confectioners' sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1/2 teaspoon almond extract (optional)

2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon cream of tartar

Directions

- In a large bowl, cream together butter and confectioners' sugar. Beat in egg, vanilla and almond extract. Mix well.
- In a medium bowl, stir together flour, baking soda and cream of tartar; blend into the butter mixture. Divide dough into thirds and shape into balls.

- Working with 1/3 of dough at a time, roll out dough into desired thickness on a lightly floured surface. For each heart sandwich cookie, cut out 2 3-inch hearts. Cut out the center of ONE of the 3-inch hearts with the 1 1/2-inch cutter.
- Place each piece separately on an ungreased cookie sheet, 1 - 2 inches apart. Bake in a preheated, 350 degrees F (175 degrees C) oven until lightly browned (7-8 minutes for 1/4 inch thick cookies). Cool completely on wire rack. Frost bottom cookie with Pink Valentine Frosting and place an open centered cookie on top to form the sandwich. Also frost the small 1 1/2 inch hearts and serve as separate cookies.

Valentine's Fun Factoids: Passing out Valentines is a 600-year-old tradition!

Millions of Americans will be lining up to buy their lovers chocolate covered strawberries and bouquets of roses this Valentine's Day. But have you ever wondered how this day dedicated to love came to be?

Valentine's Day started with the Romans. There are two theories about the origin of Valentine's Day.

According to History.com, one is that the day derives from Lupercalia, a raucous Roman festival on February 15th. The second theory is that while the Roman Emperor Claudius II was trying to bolster his army, he forbade young men to marry, because apparently single men make better soldiers. In the spirit of love, St. Valentine defied the ban and performed secret marriages, History.com reports. For his disobedience, Valentine was executed on February 14th.

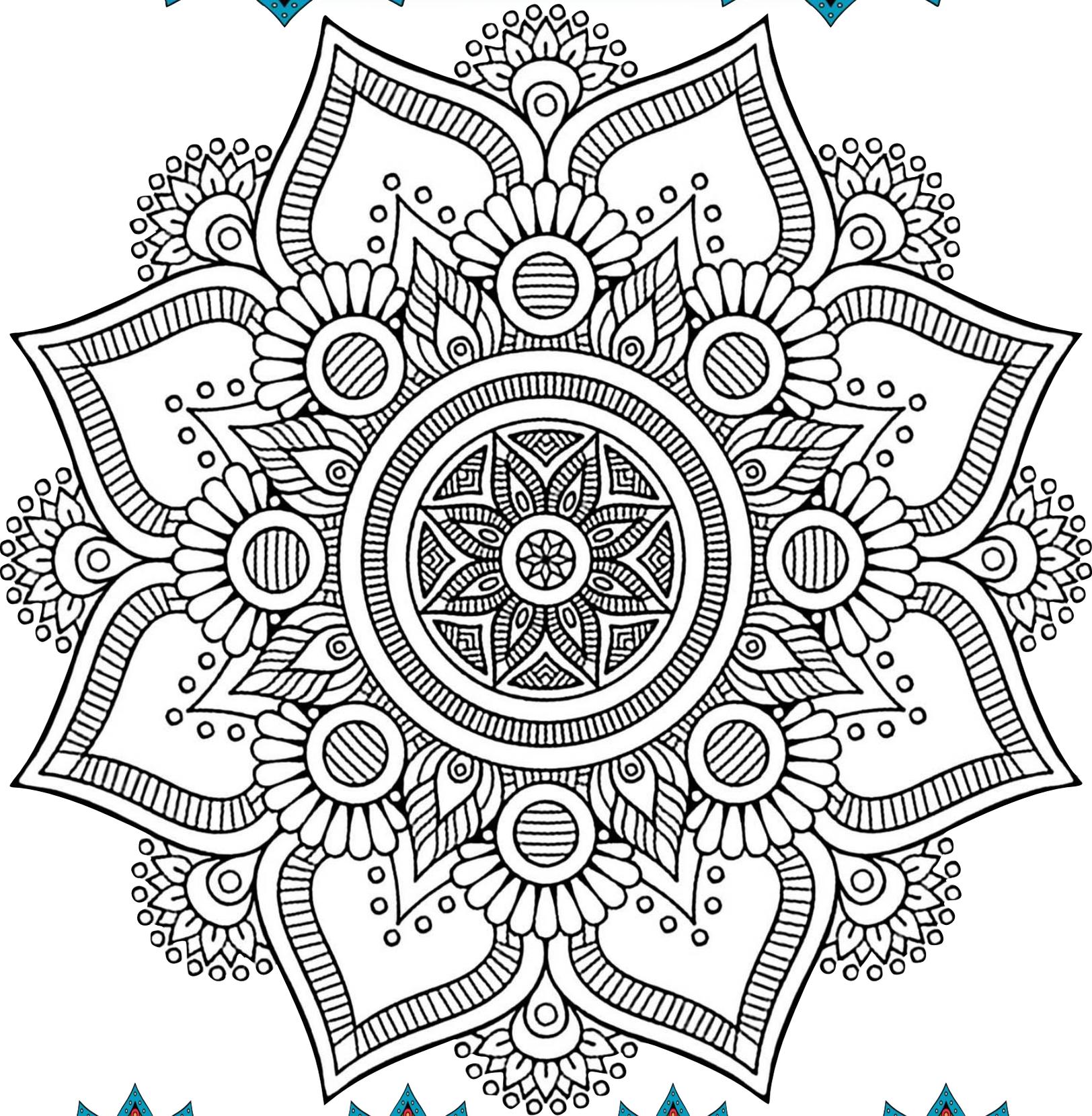
Today, millions of greeting cards are purchased every year. We're talking *144 million* greeting cards being exchanged industry-wide every year for Valentine's Day in the U.S. alone, according to Hallmark.

Wearing your heart on your sleeve is more than just a phrase. In the Middle Ages, young men and women drew names to see who their Valentine would be, the LA Times reports. According to Smithsonian, they would wear the name pinned to their sleeve for one week so that everyone would know their supposed true feelings.

People consider pink and red the colors of love. According to the National Confectioners Association, around 65% of Americans believe that the packaging of Valentine's Day candies and chocolates should be red and pink.



Candy hearts were originally medical lozenges. In 1847, Boston pharmacist Oliver Chase invented a machine that simplified the lozenge production process, resulting in the first candy-making machine, according to *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America*. After identifying an opportunity to revolutionize the candy business, Chase shifted his focus to candy production with Necco wafers.





UNITED BENEFITS

Hosted by NTEU Chapter 68



Retirement Seminar (NTEU Members Only)

Tuesday, February 25th—11:00 a.m. & 5:00 p.m.

Café Function Room 224

For those close to Retirement or Age 55

Retirement Overview & GRB Platform

Retirement Package Assistance Available for Members

Optimizing Your FERS Benefits Seminar (NTEU Members Only)

Tuesday, February 25th – 12:30 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.

Café Function Room 224

Strategies for New Hires or Employees Under Age 50 for Savings in the Future

Understanding the FERS/CSRS Benefits

Cost-Saving Strategies with FEGLI
Sick and Annual Leave

Supplemental Benefits

Benefits Seminar for Non-Members

Tuesday, February 25th—2:00pm

Café Function Room 224

United Benefits Counselors will be available by appointment Feb. 24th-27th.
Please click on the link below to set up your one on one time.

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/8050e4da8ad2ea4f85-nteu10>

Please request 1 hour of Admin time

Article 36—Section 11—Subject to workload considerations the Employer may grant an employee up to a total of four (4) hours excused absence per calendar year for the purposes of attending a health benefits fair, reviewing health benefits information and materials, receiving financial counseling, and seeking supplemental retirement counseling. Except for excused absence for retirement planning, as provided for in Article 21, no other administrative time shall be authorized for general benefit counseling.

Jim Ragan—256.312.3015
jim@unitedbenefits.com

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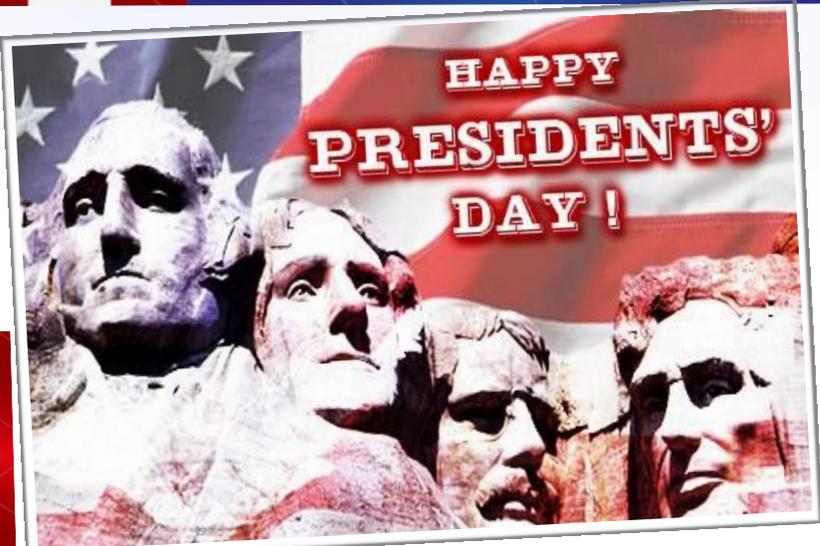
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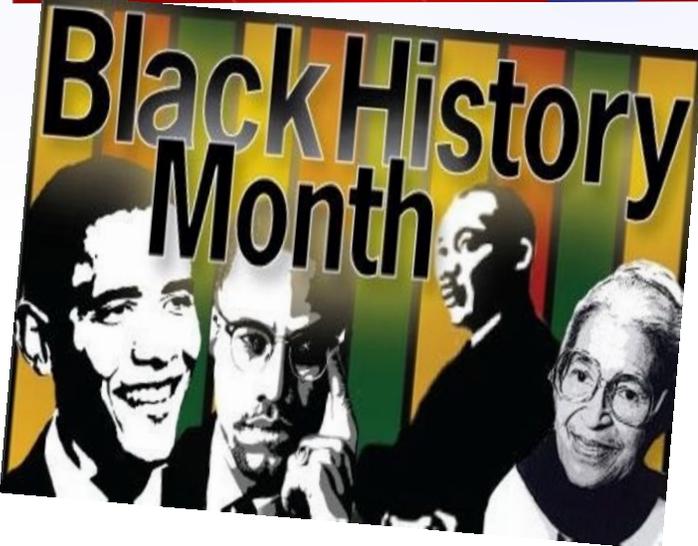
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**HAPPY
PRESIDENTS'
DAY!**



**Black History
Month**