

Election year notice:

AFGE Local 987 will be having an election in the upcoming months of 2024. It is crucial that you,

the member, have your most current mailing address on file so that you do not miss out on any important correspondence sent out during this time. If you have moved within the past three years or have

made any changes to your address, please contact AFGE Local 987 Bookkeeper Linda Baxter to update your information. She can be reached by phone at 478-922-5758 or by email at linda@afgelocal987.org.

THE UNION ADVOCATE



Local 987

Proud to make America work

Feb. 7, 2024

AFGE Local 987 Officer's Election Announcement

Dear Members,

Please be on the lookout for the election notice in the mail, as outlined in the timeline below. If you have not received the election notice by February 20th, 2024, please contact the election committee at AFGEL987EC24@gmail.com.

The election committee announces an upcoming In-Person election for the following offices as outlined in the Local Constitution and bylaws:

- President
- Executive Vice-President
- Treasurer

- Secretary
- Vice-President of Maintenance
- Vice-President of DLA
- Vice-President at-Large
- Sgt-of-Arms
- Trustees (3x)

In-Person Election Details:

■ Location: AFGE Local 987's Union Hall, 1764 Watson Blvd, Warner Robins, Georgia, 31099

Timelines:

- February 12th, 2024: Mailing of Election Notice and Union Newspaper (Feb 8th, 2024)
- February 26th, 2024: Special Nominations meeting by 5pm EST. Last day to request "Absentee Ballots".

- February 27th, 2024: Candidates nomination acceptance deadline by 4pm EST.
- February 28th, 2024: Candidates eligibility sent out by or before 8pm.
- March 4th, 2024: Candidates meeting to view election roster and receive election rules.
- April 4th, 2024: Absentee ballots picked up from the mailbox for tally at 11am EST. Voting In-Person from 7am – 7pm EST with immediate tallying at the end of the voting period. All results announced, posted at the polling site, and subsequently in the Union Newspaper.
- April 8th, 2024: Last day to request Run-off election "Absentee Ballots".
- April 19th, 2024: Run-off election Voting In-Person 7am – 7pm EST with immediate tallying at the end of the voting period.

Due process denied!

Agency creates stockpile of arbitration cases

By HENRY BROWN
Executive VP, AFGE Local 987
henry.brown@afgelocal987.org

Words have meaning. Poet, journalist and long-time editor of the New York Evening Post William Cullen Bryant said: "Truth crushed to earth will rise again."

If you ever feel our search for the truth for justice, for the

recognition of the inherent dignity in man is in vain, ask yourself: What have I done to affirm truth? An inspirational leader must embrace and affirm the truth.

When there is a proclivity to accuse someone of wrongdoing, it is often said, "They need to be held accountable." With that accountability comes the "blame game" then there is the perfunct-

tory assertion of "they should be punished!"

There is an inherent danger of using accountability as a euphemism for blame and punishment; doing so gives rise to a pragmatic perception of accountability being constructed as responsibility.

It is not. Responsible leaders do what is expected of them.

Although we want leaders to perform their duties and honor their commitments, there is not one of you reading this article that is not intimately acquainted with leaders that hide behind the veil of responsibility to shield themselves from accountability when things go wrong.

They're commonly referred to as hide and seek leaders, "I didn't do anything illegal," so you can't blame them.

Responsibility is taking ownership of an activity and not making excuses. Accountability is taking ownership of results.

Your labor office has embraced the, "I didn't do anything illegal" in denying an opportunity for due process for an exorbitant number of arbitration cases that are being held in abeyance. (Note the photos!) Our members, employees, deserve better than what is being offered by a rancorous labor office.

There is a phenomenon commonly referred to as "weaponized incompetence", I cannot in good conscience say that there is malicious intent, because the reality is more complicated than this article can convey.

In the worst case, weaponized incompetence is intentional

and calculated by people hell bent on strategically shifting the blame, as opposed to accepting the blame.

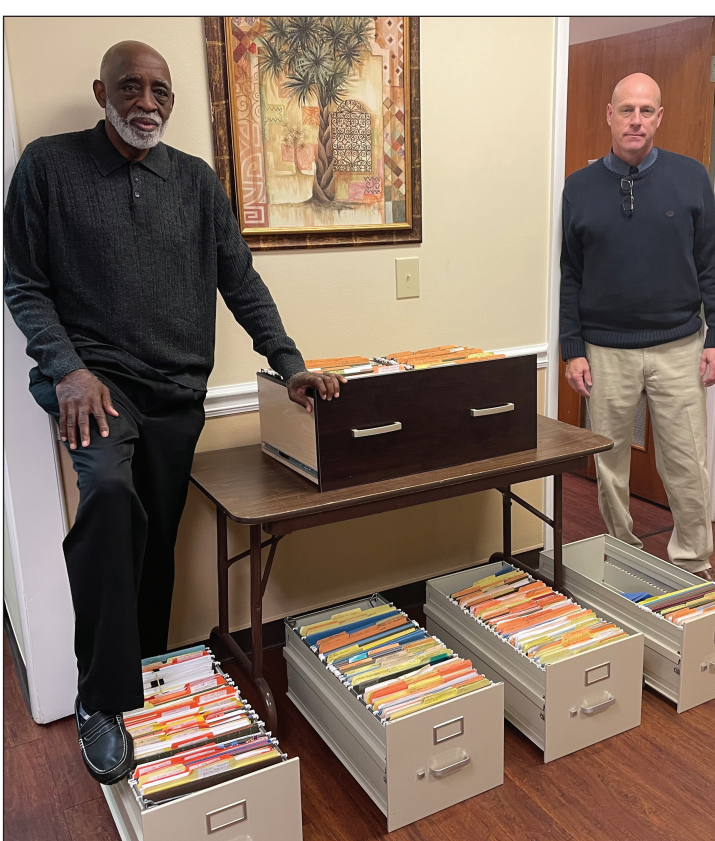
Between the labor office, and their counterpart in the management support office, together

they are very skillful at manipulation that often goes unnoticed.

It has been said that "a picture is worth a thousand words". It is an adage in multiple languages and means that complex and sometimes multiple ideas can

be conveyed by a single image. Get the picture! Again, look at the pictures attached. Look at the lives these two offices are ignoring, have put on hold, care little to nothing about!

See DENIED, page 3



Brown and Berry stand next to an additional set of files (top of table) that are being held up by the labor and management support offices. Note: These are not all. Others are scattered throughout the stewards' offices - works in progress - at the Local headquarters building. (AFGE Local 987 photo/Don Moncrief)



From left, AFGE Local 987 Full-time Steward James Watson, Executive Vice President Henry Brown, Vice President At-Large Mike Ferguson and Full-time Steward Sam Berry gather around the multitude of cases that have been heard (those on top of the table) to pending (those on the floor) all of which are being held up from moving forward/being resolved by the labor and management support offices. (AFGE Local 987 photo/Don Moncrief)

AFGE prepares for its 2024 Legislative Conference

By AFGE Leadership

AFGE is excited to welcome our members (with AFGE Local 987 sending its allocated number of representatives) to the nation's capital for our union's annual legislative conference on Feb. 11-14.

Besides being able to network, attendees will get to do some cool things that can only be found in the labor movement. What's not to love about protecting our shared values and uplifting each other?

Here are 5 things to expect from this year's conference:

1. This year's theme is Together We Rise, United We Triumph.

Our mission is to protect workers' rights and democracy, but this year is especially important as it's a presidential election year. Whoever wins will

have a profound impact on all of us for the next four years and beyond.

In addition, one third of the Senate and all 435 House seats will also be up for election. The laws that they pass will affect you.

The only way we can make sure we still have union rights and protections is to come together in solidarity and double down on our efforts to educate members on our rights, mobilize, and stand united for our cause.

2. Meet members of Congress in person

Several members of Congress understand the importance of the government workforce and share our values.

LegCon is a great opportunity to introduce yourself to the lawmakers who shape the policies that affect you.

Here's the latest list of members of Congress scheduled to speak at our

legislative conference Feb.12:

- Rep. Steny Hoyer, Md.
- Rep. Bennie Thompson, Miss.
- Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton, D.C.
- Rep. Gerry Connolly, Va.
- Sen. Chris Van Hollen, Md.

Also speaking on Monday are National Treasury Employees Union President Doreen Greenwald and Coalition of Black Trade Unionists President Terry Melvin.

■ House Speaker Hakeem Jeffries, N.Y.; Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, N.Y.; Sen. Tim Kaine, Va.; and Sen. Sherrod Brown, Ohio., will also greet AFGE members virtually via videos.

3. Get ready to learn new skills, meet cool people.

See CONFERENCE, page 3

LegCon primer: The issues

By AFGE Leadership

AFGE was founded in 1932 under one of the most challenging times in our nation's history. America was still trying to survive the Great Depression after the stock market crashed and banks collapsed. President Herbert Hoover imposed a 15% pay cut on government employees. A year later, Franklin Delano Roosevelt became president and vetoed a bill that would restore the pay cut.

AFGE successfully mobilized members to get Congress to override the veto and stop the government from balancing its budget on the

workers' back.

Besides pay, we worked hard to prevent furloughs, protect members' jobs, retirement, promotions, among other things.

Almost 92 years later, we are still doing all these and more as we face an increase in attacks from anti-worker forces whose goal is to end collective bargaining in the federal government and get rid of unions. Below is a quick recap of things we are still working on and will need all hands on deck.

1. Pay
The federal government is
See PRIMER, page 3

Youth suicide prevention: Recognize the signs

(StatePoint) Children and teens can be moody, but when signs of mental health troubles last for weeks, don't assume it's just a passing mood.

Suicide is a leading cause of death among U.S. children, teens and young adults ages 10-24, and rates have been on the rise. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that all teens be screened for suicide risk starting at age 12.

While no single cause has been identified, suicide is often preceded by depression that is undiagnosed or untreated. Most youth show some warning signs or behavior changes in advance.

Families and their doctors can work together to identify if a child or teen is struggling with depression, anxiety or substance use, all of which increase the risk of suicide.

"Suicide is complex, but often preventable," said Janet Lee, MD, FAAP. "When a person talks about killing themselves or feeling hopeless or trapped, it should always be taken seriously."

Don't be afraid to ask your child or teen to talk about their mental health or if they're contemplating suicide. Asking directly is the best way to know what your child is thinking.

Studies show that it is safe to ask about suicide risk and that asking the question will not put the idea into their head. Note that your child may initially turn away or be silent, but actions may speak louder than words. Watch for major changes in your child's sleep patterns, appetite and social activities.

Self-isolation, especially for kids who usually enjoy hanging out with friends or participating in activities, can signal serious difficulties.

"Your goal should be to create a safe space where your child can trust you to listen and express concern without judgment or blame," Dr. Lee said.

If your child says something like "I want to die" or "I don't care anymore," some suggested responses are:

- "I'm sorry you are feeling this way—can you share a bit more?"



iStock via Getty Images Plus

"Suicide is complex, but often preventable. When a person talks about killing themselves or feeling hopeless or trapped, it should always be taken seriously."

- Janet Lee, MD, FAAP

- "It sounds like you're in tremendous pain and you can't see a way out."

- "Maybe you're wondering how life got this complicated and difficult."

- "Right now, you're not sure of the answers to the problems you're facing."

- "You must really, really be hurting inside to consider ending your life."

Common causes of stress that increase the risk of suicide include major life-changing events, including the loss of a loved one to death, divorce, deployment or incarceration.

Bullying, discrimination, racism and stigma surrounding mental health or suicide can also increase risks.

Children who have witnessed or are suffering violence or domestic abuse, engage in

self-harming behavior or experienced a suicide in their school or friend group are also at higher risk of suicide.

Research has shown there are protective factors that help reduce the risk of suicide, including ready access to health care. Maintaining close connections to family, friends and one's community is also important.

Parents and guardians should limit access to lethal means, such as removing firearms and locking up medications or other potential poisons or weapons in the home.

Half of youth suicides occur with firearms—and suicide attempts with firearms are almost always fatal. Teens and adolescents who attempt suicide with a firearm almost always use a gun found in their house, studies find.

"Suicide is often impulsive and a moment of crisis can escalate quickly," Dr. Lee said. "If your child is considering suicide, call or text 988 or chat on 988lifeline.org right away. The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, as well as prevention and crisis resources."

For more information, visit HealthyChildren.org.

As children grow and become more independent, it can be more challenging to know what they are thinking and feeling. However, if you see signs that your child's mental health is under threat, it's important to tune in and take action.

Pneumococcal Pneumonia can be life-threatening; What to know

(StatePoint) Pneumococcal pneumonia can disrupt your life for weeks and, in some cases, be serious or even life-threatening.

To help adults understand how they can help protect themselves against pneumococcal pneumonia, the American Lung Association and Pfizer are partnering to share important information and patient insights about the disease.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that this lung disease causes an estimated 150,000 hospitalizations annually nationwide. Symptoms include high fever, excessive sweating, shaking chills, coughing, difficulty breathing, shortness of breath and chest pain. Some symptoms can appear quickly and without warning.

Risk factors

The immune system naturally weakens with age, so even if you're healthy and active, being 65 or older puts you at

increased risk for pneumococcal pneumonia.

In fact, adults 65 and older are over 10 times more likely to be hospitalized with pneumococcal pneumonia than those aged 18-49.

In adults 19 and older, certain factors increase pneumococcal pneumonia risk compared with healthy adults of the same age. These include smoking ciga-

rettes, chronic lung diseases like asthma and COPD, chronic heart disease and diabetes.

Prevention

Pneumococcal pneumonia vaccination can help protect against the disease and is recommended for at-risk groups.

For adults living with certain chronic health conditions

See PNEUMONIA, page 6



Photo source: iStock via Getty Images Plus

BBB warns: Stay ahead of tax ID thieves

With the Internal Revenue Service officially opening up tax season, this is the perfect time to focus on tax related ID theft scams.

Tax scams reappear often, each time with a slightly different spin. But overall, the two primary types of tax related ID theft schemes to watch out for involve IRS impersonators and false tax return filings.

IRS Impersonation Scams: These scams most often start with a phone call and take two basic forms. In the first version, the person claiming to be an "IRS agent" says you owe back taxes and pressures you into paying by prepaid debit card or wire transfer. If you don't comply, the scammer threatens you with arrest and fines.

In the other version, impostors falsely claim they are issuing you a tax refund and ask for your personal information, indicating it's needed to allow them to send your refund.

This information can later be used for identity theft. Scammers also use this approach to target college students by claiming a "federal student tax" has not been paid.

These impostors often go to great lengths to appear real. The scammer may give a fake badge number and name. Your Caller ID may look like the call is coming from Washington, D.C. or even say that the call is from the IRS, thanks to spoofing software.

Con artists sometimes follow up scam calls with an email, falsely using the IRS logo, colors, and official-sounding language. In many instances, these scams start with a serious and official sounding "robocall" recording.

Like many scams, these are designed to pressure you to act quickly. Here's some significant differences between an experience with the IRS and how scammers will try to approach you with a tax scam:

- The IRS will give you the chance to ask questions or appeal what you owe, while scammers try to push you into action before you have



Kelvin Collins

time to think.

- The IRS will always make their first contact with you by mail. Scammers will typically call, text, or email.

- Scammers will push for payments through wire transfer, a prepaid debit card, or other non-traditional payment methods that are largely untraceable and non-reversible.

The IRS will never demand immediate payment, require a specific form of payment, or ask for credit card or debt card numbers over the phone.

The IRS may call you about outstanding debts after first attempting to reach you by mail. See BBB's tips on IRS calls to tell if the IRS is really calling or if you are talking to a scammer.

Tax Identity Theft Scams: Another tax scam to look out for is tax identity theft. This occurs when a scammer uses your Social Security number to file a tax return in your name and collect your refund. It can also be someone using your information to get a job.

Consumers don't usually realize they have been victims of tax identity theft until they get a written notice from the IRS saying that more than one tax return was filed, or they were paid by an employer they don't know.

Tips to avoid tax scams

- The best way to avoid tax identity theft is to file your taxes as early as possible. File before a scammer has the chance to use your information to file a fake return. (However, should you be the victim of tax ID theft, don't panic.)

The IRS will work with you to resolve the concerns impacting your valid tax return).

- Apply for an Identity Protection PIN (IP PIN) from the IRS before you file your return. This is a six-digit number, which, in

See THIEVES, page 3

Medal of Honor spotlight

Marine Corps Pfc. Ray Clausen Jr.

By KATIE LANGE
DoD News

Marine Corps Pfc. Raymond Michael Clausen Jr. wasn't exactly known for acquiescing to authority during his time in Vietnam, and that lack of obedience helped save more than a dozen Marines who got trapped in a minefield in 1970. Clausen's fearless actions during that mission earned him the Medal of Honor.

Clausen, who went by Mike, was born on Oct. 14, 1947, in New Orleans to parents Ray Sr. and Mary Louise. He had a sister and three brothers, two of whom also served in the Marines.

After first grade, Clausen's family moved to Hammond, Louisiana, where he attended a Catholic primary school and was an altar boy at his church. Eventually, he switched to public school, graduating from Hammond High School in 1965. That fall, he started classes at nearby Southeastern Louisiana University, but after reading daily about all that was happening in Vietnam, he decided he needed to be part of the war effort.

Clausen enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve in March 1966. By May of that year, he was discharged so he could join the regular Marines. After attending aviation school, Clausen was deployed to Vietnam, where he served as a jet helicopter mechanic with Marine Aircraft Group 16 of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.

Clausen returned to the U.S. for a short time before volunteering to go back in November 1969. In a Veteran's History



Photo courtesy defense.gov

Marine Corps Pfc. Ray Clausen Jr.

Project Library of Congress interview in the early 2000s, he said his mother didn't like the idea and asked him why he wanted to return.

"I said, 'There's something I've got to do. I haven't done it yet, but there's something I've got to do,'" Clausen remembered.

When he got back to Vietnam, he remained with MAG 16 in Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 263. As a helicopter crew chief, most of his missions were doing reconnaissance and Medevac flights. His job was to make sure all systems were a go for each flight, and while in the air, his role included clearing pilots in and out of landing zones and directing gunners.

On Jan. 31, 1970, his CH-46D Sea Knight and two other helicopters had dropped

Marines into a field for a mission. A short time later, he said they were called back to extract some of those men, who had inadvertently stumbled into a minefield during a firefight with the enemy.

"The radio operator called up the helicopter and asked us if we'd come in and take up the wounded," Clausen recalled. When the pilot asked Clausen if they should go, the young crew chief replied, "Considering we put them in there, I think it's only right that we should get them out."

Nearly a dozen Marines had been wounded or killed, and those who remained held their positions for fear of detonating more mines if they moved. Clausen skillfully guided his pilot to a landing area that looked safe because several mines had already exploded there — although, he said, he really didn't know what a mine looked like and had no expertise on the matter.

Without hesitation, Clausen immediately ran off the chopper. When he reached the radio operator who had called for their help, that man pulled off Clausen's helmet and yelled at him about

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"I picked up the ones who couldn't walk, and the ones who could walk sort of followed in my footsteps - thinking I knew where the mines were."

- Marine Corps Pfc. Ray Clausen Jr.

Global Day of Unplugging - March 1

3 real-world alternatives to activities you do on your device

(SPM Wire) With more time spent staring at screens than ever before, sometimes it's important to unplug, and connect with the world in a different way. Celebrated on March 1, Global Day of Unplugging is an annual occasion to put down your phone, tablet or computer.

To make the most of the day, consider these three real-world alternatives to activities you may be doing on your devices:

- Volunteer: With 24/7 access to the news cycle, it's all too easy to "doomscroll." Instead of taking in negative news on your phone, be the change you wish to see by volunteering in your community.

- Meet up "IRL": Instant messaging is the single most popular online activity reported by adult internet users, according to Statista. But there's no substitute for face-to-face interactions.

Message the group chat in advance of March 1 and ask them if they'd like to continue the conversation in person that day.

- Get outdoors: Rather than turning to your internet-connected stationary bike or to Instagram for workout inspiration, pair fitness with new scenery. Whether you go on a hike, play pick-up soccer in the park, or lace up sneakers for a run, you'll enjoy turning your sweat session into an opportunity to get some fresh air.

THE UNION ADVOCATE

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chaser, user or patron.

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Please submit articles, photos, etc to don.moncrief@afge-local987.org. For questions about story content, to pass on story ideas or to request coverage, please contact the aforementioned.

DENIED

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The Agency's representatives are likely to couch their case as being in the "best interests of the Agency" but, first and foremost, what they are supporting is generally in "their" best interest. In this situation, what's best for Robins Air Force Base? Instead,

the two offices miss the mark by a mile when it comes to the employees.

(I might add that there is animus and vile disdain for the Local 987 by one of the management officials after being summarily removed from an appointed office here. That member has snaked their way into a position where they have used the position to retaliate

against our members or for that matter anyone else serving the membership. Will he prevail? Absolutely NOT! The dirt you do today will find its way back to you.)

If this backlog is a by-product of the lack of people in the labor office with the requisite skill set, then the best solution is a rigorous increase in training. It is important to be flexible and

let these cases be assigned to an arbitrator.

Since there is an impasse between labor and the Local, I am certain that both the 402nd and 78th Commander's have the cachet to facilitate moving the process along.

There is a moral imperative in play. Certainty, tomorrow will make all words spoken today either a truth or a lie tomorrow.

CONFERENCE

From page 1

At the conference, you will hear from our in-house experts about legislation and policies that affect you. AFGE will offer several educational training workshops to help prepare you for lobbying and legislative advocacy.

Our communications workshop, for example, will help you leverage communications to mobilize members around legislative issues.

At the Equal Employment Opportunity workshop, you'll learn about reasonable accommodation, PUMP for Nursing Mothers Act, and Pregnant Worker's Fairness Act. The General Counsel's Office will host a Hatch Act and Anti-Lobbying Act clinic. There will also be a YOUNG Workshop, PRIDE workshop, and diversity workshop.

This year we've also added a workshop that will help you protect your retirement after decades of hard work. You'll learn about legislation and policies that affect your retirement and what you can do to protect it. We'll also discuss tips to avoid mistakes and surprises as you approach your retirement.

If you attend the civil rights luncheon, you'll get to meet Maya Wiley, CEO and president of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. Wiley served as counsel to New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio and chaired the New York City Civilian Complaint Review Board.

4. Rally on Capitol Hill After strategizing with your fellow union members, you'll get to visit your representatives and senators on Capitol Hill to discuss issues that are important to you.

We will also have a rally Feb. 13 to call on Congress to fully fund our government. Several lawmakers and labor leaders are

scheduled to speak, including AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Fred Redmond, Sen. Brian Schatz, Hawaii; Reps. John Larson, Conn.; Maxwell Frost, Fla.; Greg Casar, Texas; Jamie Raskin, Md.; Glenn Ivey, Md.; and Donald Norcross, N.J.

5. Honor those who've made a difference

We are lucky to have so many activists who have a passion for labor rights and helping other people. This year we honor three people who go above and beyond to make a difference and move our union forward.

■ Legislative and Political Coordinator of the Year: Joshua Lepird (District 9, Local L017, Bureau of Prisons)

■ Veteran of the Year: Arthur Blackwell (District 3, Local 1916, Department of Energy)

■ Retiree of the Year: Geneva Moore (District 4, Local 1738, Veterans Benefits Administration)

PRIMER

From page 1

still very much balancing its budget on the workers' backs. Federal employees today earn 27.5% less than those doing similar jobs in the private sector.

To help close the pay gap, AFGE urges Congress to pass The FAIR Act that would provide a 7.4% pay increase for federal workers next year.

2. The merit system

There have been attempts to weaken due process rights, competitive hiring, union representation. In some cases, they already succeeded. A few years ago Congress passed a bill that drastically altered the right to appeal adverse actions and terminations at the Department of Veterans Affairs. It superseded collective bargaining agreements, shortened adverse action timeframes and lowered evidentiary standards for managers.

At the Department of Defense, a pilot program limits all attorneys and cybersecurity workers to terms of two to eight years. Nonrenewal of a term is a firing with no appeal right, and no accountability for corrupt personnel practices.

Bills that target just one agency or one group of federal employees within an agency do not mean that civil service protections for everyone else are safe. In each case, these bills are a first step toward undermining the apolitical civil service, inviting politicization, and increasing privatization of government work.

3. Workplace rights and protections

Lawmakers whose goal is to get rid of workplace due process, cut pay, and reduce or eliminate health insurance and retirement benefits for federal workers, or just privatize everything must first eliminate the biggest obstacle in their path: federal employee unions.

There are many ways they can get rid of unions, including ending official time for union reps so we can't represent workers, and prohibit the deduction of union dues from employees' paychecks to weaken our finances.

To make sure that AFGE members on the job have representatives with the time and resources to fight back when employees' rights are violated, we must protect official time and dues deduction.

4. The Fiscal Commission

Americans value Social Security and Medicare, the popular social insurance programs they pay into and rely on during their golden years. Over 80% of registered voters from across the political spectrum not only oppose cutting Social Security and Medicare benefits but also support increasing funding for these programs. Yet there have been attempts by politicians and special interests to gut them, and they're doing it behind closed doors via a so-called fiscal commission.

Congress is considering the Fiscal Commission Act of 2023 (H.R. 5779) introduced by Rep. Bill Huizenga, R-Mich., that would establish a fiscal commission that would raise eligibility ages and cut benefits to Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and other government programs.

The last such commission, known as Simpson-Bowles, issued a set of recom-

mendations for cutting Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and federal employee compensation. The only ones enacted were cuts to the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS). As a result, federal employees hired after 2013 pay far more for their retirement than coworkers hired before that date.

If a benefit-slashing commission is established again, it must be prohibited from using federal retirement benefits to achieve budget savings. The administration and Congress should strongly oppose any effort to cut social insurance programs and/or federal employee compensation either through a fiscal commission or by other means.

5. Privatization

Agencies should manage their in-house workforces by budgets and workloads instead of arbitrary personnel caps, freezes, and cuts. Hiring freezes and/or arbitrary constraints on the number of civilian federal employees force managers to use contractors, even when they cost more, or the work is inherently governmental.

Congress should continue to ban the use of OMB Circular A-76, the process used to contract out federal work, until OMB rewrites it to correct its many flaws.

The ban should also continue until agencies comply with Congress's mandate that they inventory their service contracts so that the numbers and costs associated with the contractor workforce become known for purposes of budget planning and learning how much inherently governmental work has been improperly outsourced. If agencies have work to do and money to pay for that work, then they should be allowed to use federal employees.

HONOR

From page 2

entering a minefield.

"So, I sort of flew back to the helicopter, not even touching the ground. I was on the ramp looking out. I was carrying a stretcher toward the helicopter when one of the men carrying the stretcher stepped on a mine.

The concussion and shrapnel knocked them all off their feet," Clausen remembered.

He said he immediately told this pilot that he was going back out. His pilot tried to tell him to stay put, but it was too late. "I was already disconnected. I was gone," Clausen said.

Despite the potential for hitting more mines, he went about his business collecting the injured.

"I picked up the ones who couldn't walk, and the ones who could walk sort of followed in my footsteps — thinking I knew what mines were," he said, chuckling at that thought. "We did all this under fire."

Clausen left the relative safety of the helicopter six times to carry out his rescue efforts. He said in total, they landed in

three different areas twice, and he entered the minefield each time to help.

He remembered one occasion during a landing when they hit and detonated a mine right near a fallen corpsman whose body was still on the ground. Clausen hopped off the chopper and rescued three other wounded men before grabbing the slain corpsman to bring him home.

Only when Clausen was certain that all the Marines were safely aboard the helicopter did he signal to the pilot to head back to base. When they got there, Clausen said his pilot reprimanded him for not following orders, threatening a court martial.

Clausen said he'd disobeyed authority several times — a 2004 Boston Globe profile about him said he'd been demoted after every promotion — but the reprimand never happened.

"[My pilot then] said, 'After what you did, there's no way in hell I can court martial you,'" Clausen remembered.

The 22-year-old was credited with saving 18 Marines that day.

"I personally carried six of the Marines out of the mine-

field, two in each place I landed. The rest of the Marines in the area who could walk ... followed me out," he humbly said during the Library of Congress interview.

After that mission, Clausen came back to the U.S. and was released from active duty on Aug. 19, 1970. He took a job as an inspector for Boeing, but soon after, he got into a very serious car crash that temporarily left him in a coma. According to the Boston Globe, the crash nearly blinded him in one eye, and he had trouble walking for a while.

Clausen was at his home in Ponchatoula, Louisiana, recovering from the incident when he got a letter telling him he had earned the Medal of Honor. He received it on June 15, 1971, from President Richard M. Nixon during a White House ceremony. His accolades also include 98 Air Medals from the more than 3,000 hours he flew in combat.

In the Library of Congress interview, Clausen said he never considered himself a hero — just a man who did what had to be done. He said his Medal of Honor is shared with all of

the helicopter crewmen with whom he served.

"Everybody that ever landed anywhere in Vietnam, ever flew in Vietnam — we all share in having the medal," he said.

In 1976, Clausen married his long-time girlfriend, Lois. He spent much of the rest of his life doing public speaking events and talking with veterans' organizations about his experience, even though his health was deteriorating.

Clausen died of liver failure on May 30, 2004, while receiving treatment at Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas. He was 56.

Soon after, he was buried in Ponchatoula City Cemetery in the town in which he spent his later years.

About a decade before his death, Clausen donated his Medal of Honor to the National Naval Aviation Museum in Pensacola, Florida, where it is on permanent display.

After his death, a Medal of Honor display that included one of his uniforms and a copy of his citation was set up at the Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 1052 in Independence, Louisiana.

THIEVES

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addition to your Social Security number, confirms your identity when filing your tax return. This is a great proactive tool that can keep others from falsely filing a tax return in your name.

It is important to note that you cannot opt-out once you get an IP PIN. So, once you apply, you must provide the IP PIN each year when you file your federal tax returns. The IRS will provide your IP PIN online and then send you a new IP PIN each December by postal mail. Visit the IRS for

more information about the program. Read BBB's tips about the IRS PIN.

■ Remember that the IRS does not initiate contact with taxpayers by email, text message or social media to request personal or financial information. This includes requests for PIN numbers, passwords or similar access information for credit cards, banks or other financial accounts. If these methods are used, don't respond and don't click on any links.

■ Check out websites carefully and make sure you are accessing the real IRS when filing your taxes electronically or inquiring for additional information.

■ If you get tax information delivered

electronically from your employer or other entity, treat that information carefully. Download it onto a password-protected computer.

If you are the victim of tax identity theft in the U.S., contact the IRS at 1-800-908-4490. You should also file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission at ftc.gov/complaint or by calling 1-877-FTC-HELP. The FTC also offers a personalized identity theft recovery plan at identitytheft.gov.

Help make others aware by also sharing your experience on BBB Scam Tracker. For more information on tax related topics, please visit BBB's Tax tips and resources page.

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

Actions/decisions:

Whiting-Turner to pay \$1.2 to settle racial harassment, retaliation suit

The Whiting-Turner Contracting Company, a construction management and general contracting company headquartered in Baltimore, will pay \$1.2 million to a class of Black former workers and furnish other relief to settle a race harassment and retaliation lawsuit brought against it by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the agency announced recently.

According to the EEOC's lawsuit, Whiting-Turner served as the prime contractor for the construction of the Google Data Center in Clarksville, Tenn. From at least May 2018 through the fall of 2019, the EEOC charged that Whiting-Turner subjected Black employees who worked at a construction jobsite to a racially hostile work environment and retaliated against two employees after they complained about race discrimination. The discriminatory treatment included referring to Black employees as "boy" "m-----" and "you." Many porta potties and buildings on the jobsite were defaced with racially offensive graffiti and a noose was displayed in the workplace on Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. Although Black employees reported these issues to Whiting-Turner several times, the company failed to investigate the complaints and instead fired two employees after they complained about the discrimination.

Along with the monetary relief, the two-year consent decree, entered by Chief District Judge Waverly D. Crenshaw, Jr., requires Whiting-Turner to incorporate a strict prohibition against racial graffiti, racial jokes, racial slurs, racial epithets, and hate symbols into its anti-harassment policy; assign an EEO liaison to each of its construction sites; and conduct semi-annual training on Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Houchens Food Group to pay \$50K to settle EEOC sexual harassment lawsuit

Houchens Food Group, Inc., owner and operator of Pic-N-Sav grocery stores in several states and headquartered in Bowling Green, Kentucky, has agreed to pay \$50,000 and provide other relief to settle a sexual harassment lawsuit filed by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the federal agency announced recently.

According to the EEOC's lawsuit, Houchens Food Group subjected female employees at the Pic-N-Sav grocery store in Evergreen, Ala., to frequent, unwelcome sexual touching by a regular customer of the store for several years. Although female employees repeatedly complained to store supervisors, the company failed to take prompt corrective action to prevent or stop the harassment. The four-year consent decree resolving the lawsuit requires Houchens Food Group to pay \$50,000 to one victim of the harassment. Houchens Food Group will develop or revise policies and procedures to prevent and correct sexual harassment. The company is also required to conduct annual training for employees and managers in its Evergreen store and 15 other stores in Alabama to ensure compliance with these policies and the law.

Lilly to pay \$2.4 million to settle nationwide EEOC age discrimination lawsuit

Lilly USA, LLC, a pharmaceutical corporation based in Indianapolis, Ind., and its parent company, Eli Lilly and Company, will pay \$2.4 million and provide other equitable relief to settle a nationwide class age discrimination lawsuit brought by the EEOC, the agency announced recently.

The EEOC's lawsuit sought relief for pharmaceutical sales representative applicants who were denied positions due to Lilly's "Early Career" hiring initiative. The Early Career hiring initiative, which was in place from 2017 to 2021, included goals designed to change hiring preferences to add more millennials to Lilly's workforce.

The employer's alleged conduct in this case violated the Age Discrimination in Employment Act which prohibits discriminating against employees aged 40 and over.

The consent decree resolving the case sets up a claims process that will identify and compensate individuals aged 40 or older who applied for and were denied primary care sales representative positions in the Lilly Diabetes Business Unit from January 1, 2017, through June 30, 2020.

In addition, the decree requires Lilly to provide EEO training to certain managers and human resources personnel, survey job applicants on whether they experienced discrimination, and specifically state in contracts with third-party recruiters that it does not discriminate against candidates based upon age.

National Labor Relations Board

Actions/decisions:

Settlement requires Star Garden to reinstate, bargain with unlawfully fired dancers

The NLRB's Region 31-Los Angeles office conducted a ballot count for Dancers/Entertainers and DJs at 21st Century Valet Parking, LLC d/b/a Star Garden Enterprise ("Star Garden"), an adult entertainment venue in Los Angeles, Calif., recently. The workers voted to be represented by Actors Equity Association 17-0.

On May 16, 2023, the Regional Director of Region 31 approved a settlement agreement between the parties resolving multiple unfair labor practice allegations, which were set for trial.

Among other remedies obtained in the settlement, Star Garden agreed to take the following steps upon the anticipated granting of a motion to dismiss its bankruptcy proceedings:

- Reopen its business, and reinstate certain employees, placing others on a preferential hiring list;
- Pay backpay to employees;
- Immediately recognize the union and abide by a bargaining schedule with the union;
- And not refile for bankruptcy for one year (or Chapter 11 bankruptcy for 18 months).

In addition, Star Garden agreed to post, distribute, and read a notice to employees about employee rights under the National Labor Relations Act and agreed to permit a Board agent to train its managers and supervisors about the National Labor Relations Act and unfair labor practices.

3 Tips to *Take Control* of Car Maintenance

FAMILY FEATURES

Economic factors made 2023 a record year for motorists, but not in ways that helped most families' household budgets.

The average price of a new car peaked at nearly \$50,000 while the average age of cars on the road surpassed 12 years, a record, according to S&P.

Rising costs for new cars and an aging fleet of vehicles on the road go hand-in-hand and, for most drivers, this means staying on top of vehicle maintenance is crucial. Yet even maintenance has become more difficult as the cost of parts and labor increase, leaving drivers with a sometimes daunting list of automotive DIY projects or parts to source when their mechanic is out of stock.

Common Fears About Automotive DIY

For people new to car maintenance and repair, getting started can feel overwhelming. Because many families count on their cars to get where they need to go, it seems like a lot could go wrong with an average of 30,000 parts under the hood of a gasoline-powered vehicle.

Consider these common situations that could make someone hesitant to take on a DIY project:

- Finding the best place to get parts to fit your needs
- Being unsure if a part is high enough quality to last and keep your car on the road
- Not knowing if the part you ordered will fit your car

For most, these fears boil down to being unsure if a part is right for the job, or if they're skilled enough to install it.



Tips to Get the Repair Done Right

Now, more automotive parts and accessories retailers offer tools to help guide DIYers toward the right inventory for their needs. From brick-and-mortar shops to online marketplaces like eBay Motors, they can enjoy access to more resources to help find the exact part and good value:

- **Consider shopping online:** While physical retailers may have parts that work in a pinch, they may not be the best part for a project or offer the best value. Searching online retailers can provide access to millions of parts and accessories – including hard-to-find and discontinued items – from trusted car manufacturers and reliable aftermarket part brands.
- **Look for fitment guarantees:** There are few things more frustrating than being halfway through a repair only to learn a part doesn't fit. To help ensure you're buying with confidence, the eBay Guaranteed Fit program allows users to

add a vehicle to "My Garage" then quickly and easily search for parts. If there's a green "Fits" check, you can rest assured it's guaranteed to fit or your money back.

- **Take advantage of services and educational tools:** Some online parts destinations offer features on-site or via app that connect you with licensed mechanics live if you're unsure of how to approach a repair or maintenance, from something simple like a filter change to help with more advanced jobs, like replacing spark plugs. When it comes to sourcing and installing parts like tires, look for marketplaces that offer a wide selection of top brands and services that ship your order straight to your local shop for convenient installation.

With the right resources, car projects can feel more manageable. To get started, visit eBayMotors.com to find how-to resources, parts and accessories to tackle some DIY projects, including filters, wiper blades, spark plugs, batteries, light bulbs and more.

7 Valentine's Day date ideas to break from the norm

(Family Features)

If you're feeling pressure to plan the perfect Valentine's Day date, it may be time to veer away from tradition.

While flowers, chocolates and dinner for two is a classic, thinking outside the box can make for just as romantic of an experience.

Consider these simple date ideas to reduce stress and make your day extra special.

Take a dance class

Learning something new together can be a great way to bond with your significant other. Research dance studios in your area and book a lesson for a night out. Many studios offer new or first-time discounts and typically have a variety of lessons available from ballroom to salsa, cha cha and more.

If dancing isn't really your thing, consider another skill-building class you can do together like pottery, cooking or painting, for example.

Recreate your first date

Take a trip down memory lane and go back to the beginning of your relationship by recreating your first - or a favorite - date.

Whether you went bowling, mini golfing, to dinner and a movie or something else entirely, reliving the past can be a special way to con-

nect and show your partner how much you care.

Plan an indoor picnic

If it's too cold outside for an actual picnic, clear some space in your living room and throw down a blanket.

Pack a basket of finger foods like sandwiches, cheese and crackers, fruit, a bottle of wine and dessert for a romantic meal for two in the comfort of home.

Book a staycation

A getaway doesn't have to mean going far from home. Become tourists in town by booking a night at a nearby hotel and visiting some local landmarks you've been wanting to check out or haven't experienced in a while.

A simple break from routine can make for an enjoyable escape, even if you're only a few miles from home.

Schedule a photoshoot

If the last time you had your photo professionally taken was on your wedding day or a family vacation, hire a photographer for a couples photo session, and use it as an opportunity to create fun memories together.

Many photographers offer mini sessions, which only take 15-30 minutes, leaving time for a night out afterward.

For an inexpensive option, have a

friend take a few casual pictures or use a selfie stick to help document your date.

Cook dinner together

Restaurants are often booked up on Valentine's Day, so try something different this year and make a special home-cooked meal together.

Whether you make a tried-and-

true favorite or whip up something new, like a heart-shaped dish, you'll bond over the experience while creating a tangible (and hopefully tasty) reward once the oven timer dings.

Then dim the lights, play some soft music and light some candles to create a romantic ambience while enjoying dinner together.

Go on a road trip

Take a day - or a weekend - and venture to a destination you haven't been before on a romantic getaway. Even if traveling far away isn't possible right now, exploring a town or two over allows you to check out new restaurants, stores or other attractions and get out of your comfort zones.



Photo courtesy of Unsplash

STEP 1:

Go to www.joinafge.org



STEP 2:

Select your Agency and Local Number



STEP 3:

Fill out the one-page membership form and click "Join"



STEP 4:

If you're a new member, select a rebate campaign and fill out the brief form (local participation may vary)



Join
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steps:

Give Comfort Food Classics an Authentic Mexican Twist

FAMILY FEATURES

If winter evenings have you stuck in a dinner rut, heat up the kitchen with family favorites everyone can look forward to. Shaking off the chill can start with a cozy blanket and comforting food that warms you from the inside out.

Soup is a wintertime staple thanks to its simplicity, and you can put a delicious spin on your next winter warmup with Mexican-inspired ingredients. Giving soup night a twist starts with Cacique Foods, one of the country's top authentic Mexican food brands, that invites friends and family to share real moments while savoring authentic flavors.

This Smoky Chorizo and Chicken Pozole relies on the bold, hearty, spicy taste of Cacique's Pork Chorizo combined with handcrafted Homestyle Salsa. Queso Fresco's crumbly, creamy texture and milky, fresh flavor adds the perfect finishing touch, making this soup a perfect way to warm up weeknights with just the right amount of heat.

For a flavorful side that complements a variety of main courses while adding Mexican flair, consider Mexican Loaded Mashed Potatoes. This recipe is a familiar favorite with the unique twist of bacon and Pork Chorizo for a meat-infused recipe that will become a menu mainstay.

Plus, for an extra creamy texture, it calls for Cacique Crema Mexicana – an everyday table cream with a neutral, fresh-tasting flavor ideal for balancing out spice – and Oaxaca, a semisoft cheese with a mellow, buttery flavor.

Find more comforting recipes at caciquefoods.com.



Smoky Chorizo and Chicken Pozole

Prep time: 5 minutes
Cook time: 30 minutes
Servings: 6-8

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 large white or yellow onion, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus additional, to taste (optional)
- 1 package (9 ounces) Cacique Pork Chorizo
- 2 teaspoons smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon dried Mexican oregano
- 1 container (16 ounces) Cacique Medium Homestyle Salsa
- 1 quart chicken stock
- 2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs or breasts, trimmed of excess fat and diced
- 1 can (25 ounces) white hominy, drained and rinsed
- 1 lime, cut into wedges
- 3/4 cup crumbled Cacique Ranchero Queso Fresco
- 1/2 cup chopped cilantro

In large, heavy pot over medium heat, heat oil. Reserve 1/4 cup onion for garnish; add remaining onion to pot and season with salt. Sauté until translucent, about 5 minutes.

Increase heat to medium-high; add pork chorizo and break it apart with spoon. Cook chorizo undisturbed until deeply browned and cooked through, 3-5 minutes. Add smoked paprika and oregano; cook 30 seconds, or until fragrant.

Pour in salsa and scrape up browned bits from bottom of pan. Bring to simmer 1-2 minutes, allowing it to thicken slightly then add stock and bring to simmer.

Stir in diced chicken and hominy. Decrease heat to medium and cook 8-10 minutes until chicken is cooked through. Taste and season with more salt, if necessary. Remove from heat.

Serve bowls of pozole with reserved onion, lime wedges, crumbled queso fresco and chopped cilantro.



Mexican Loaded Mashed Potatoes

Prep time: 35 minutes
Cook time: 40 minutes
Servings: 10

- 3 pounds russet potatoes (about 9 medium potatoes), peeled and cubed
- 6 bacon strips, chopped
- 1 package Cacique Pork Chorizo
- 12 ounces Cacique Crema Mexicana
- 1/2 cup butter, cubed
- 1 1/2 teaspoons onion powder

- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1 cup Cacique Oaxaca or Queso Quesadilla, shredded
- 1/2 cup Cacique Crema Mexicana Agria, for topping (optional)
- 3 green onions, chopped

In Dutch oven, add potatoes and cover with water. Bring to boil. Reduce heat; cook, uncovered, 10-15 minutes, or until tender.

In skillet over medium heat, cook bacon until crisp. Drain on paper towels, chop into small pieces and set aside. Remove bacon

grease from skillet and cook chorizo over medium-high heat, 6-8 minutes.

Drain potatoes; add to pan. Mash potatoes, gradually adding crema Mexicana, butter, onion powder, salt, garlic powder and pepper. Transfer to greased 13-by-9-inch baking dish; sprinkle with cheese, chorizo and bacon. Refrigerate, covered, up to 1 day.

Preheat oven to 350 F. Remove potatoes from refrigerator and let stand while oven heats. Bake, covered, about 30 minutes. Uncover; bake 10 minutes, or until heated through.

Drizzle with crema Mexicana agria and chopped green onions.

PNEUMONIA

From page 2

and those 65 or older, vaccination helps protect against a potentially life-threatening illness.

"Having asthma can sometimes restrict me from doing things I love, so I really try to take proactive steps to help keep myself healthy, like avoiding my known asthma triggers and following my doctors' advice,"

says Catherine, a patient who was diagnosed with asthma in adulthood. "I didn't even think I was old enough to get vaccinated for pneumococcal pneumonia, but when my doctor recommended it, I got it because I trust him.

"I like the comfort of knowing it's helping to protect me against this potentially serious lung disease."

In addition to being up to date on your vaccinations, washing your hands, and not smoking

are all habits that can help prevent pneumococcal pneumonia. Those with chronic illnesses should also follow the care recommendations for their condition.

Disparities

The 2025 Vaccines National Strategic Plan has pneumococcal disease vaccination rate targets of 90% for people 65 years and older and 60% for adults with underlying health conditions at increased risk of

disease. Unfortunately, current vaccination rates are falling far short of these goals – especially among Black and Hispanic/Latino-communities.

In 2021, pneumococcal vaccination coverage among all U.S. adults aged 65 and older was 70.1%. However, the rate was around 60% among the Black population and around 52% among the Hispanic/Latino population of the same age group.

Latino and Black adults are

also at greater risk of developing certain chronic health conditions, such as asthma and diabetes, compared to individuals who are white. It's important that all adults at risk take steps to help protect themselves against infection.

What should you do?

If you're at increased risk for pneumococcal pneumonia, talk to your doctor or pharmacist about vaccination. Being an active part of your healthcare

team, advocating for yourself and asking questions is important. Even if you've previously had a pneumonia vaccine, your healthcare provider may recommend additional vaccination for increased protection.

You can learn more, as well as take a quiz to assess your risk, by visiting lung.org/pneumococcal. Pneumococcal pneumonia can be serious. Talk to your healthcare provider about how to help prevent this lung disease.

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