

Black Leaders Advancing Change and Knowledge

2 Virtual Lunch, Learns set

Special to The Union Advocate

AFGE’s Women’s and Fair Practices departments and AFGE Black Leaders Advancing Change and Knowledge will kick off the new year with the virtual events: “BLACK Lunch and Learn: Race Discrimination and Litigation Strategies. It will be held Jan. 17 at 11 a.m. and Jan. 24 at 7:30 p.m.

The events, said AFGE National Vice President for Women’s and Fair Practices Jeremy Lannan will cover an “overview of race discrimination”. They will consist of two panel discussions with AFGE’s Women’s and Fair Practices EEO attorneys.

The first panel discussion – the Jan. 17 date – Lannan said, will focus on how to prove a non-selection was based on race and will end with the highlighting of a few non-selection case decisions.

The second – Jan. 24 - will focus on adverse actions, addressing discipline at the lowest level, how to prove an adverse action was based on race, and will end with the highlighting of a few adverse action case decisions.

Both will be held via Zoom. Email wfptraining@afge.org to obtain the link for one or both.

Veterans Crisis Line

DIAL 988 then PRESS 1

In memory ...

Kelcey S. Jones

Passed away

Jan. 1, 2024

Member since

Oct. 21, 2020

MONTH

Save the date

Membership meeting

Local 987 will have a membership meeting Jan. 18 at 5 p.m. (Doors open at 4 p.m., with refreshments/available.) It will be held at Union Hall, located at 1764 Watson Blvd. (It will also be on Zoom.) As always, membership will be verified before admittance into the meeting. You can make updates to your contact information - address, phone, email - by calling Union Hall at 478-922-5758 or by emailing Linda Baxter at linda@afgelocal987.org or Jeanette McElhaneay at jmac@afgelocal987.org.

2024: Anticipated challenges, opportunities

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

Whatever your holiday traditions and beliefs, I hope you and your family had a safe, enjoyable holiday.

An arduous journey begins with the sharing of information and working towards the goal of not becoming injured to some of management’s words and deeds as bargaining unit employees.

In fact, for any employee there is the responsibility of not so much trusting but “verifying” the words coming out of managers’ mouths. It’s like the old “they made me do it,” question, who they are and did they tell you that the union has agreed to it? Until you verify who they are, never trust that



Henry Brown

the union has agreed to anything.

With last year in the review mirror, the representation struggle continues in 2024. In addition to the daily battles to enforce the Agency to comply with the contract, I’d like to

highlight some of our upcoming challenges and opportunities.

Safety and Toxic Workplace: Management’s creation of hostile working conditions is a long-standing and worsening challenge. Together, from every nook and cranny, every organization to every manager, we will represent your interests absent of any backroom deals.

The Agency’s investigatory process has been one of not being able to find any fault with the aberrant treatment of bargaining unit employees and if the investigation validates there exists grounds to discipline a manager, it’s done with a “wink wink” and a promotion.

The Master Labor

Agreement (MLA). As you probably know, it is the main contract which addresses our arbitration process.

When you elected us to office there was a concerted effort to locate the old case load as most of you should be aware of, the Agency is now making excuses as to prolong the process. I am not a betting man however, as the losses mount for the Agency there appears to be a reluctance to arbitrate cases.

I want to advise our members of our reaching out to the command to address the Agency’s slow rolling the process. They have gone so far as to encourage your full-time Steward Sam Berry to take a sabbatical from representing you.

Good luck with that. He is on the prowl and to be sure he’s a winner. Never let anyone tell you that he is not.

Together, from every discipline that a bargaining unit employee works - be that the floor or an office space to the negotiating table, from the streets to Capitol Hill - we must compel management to respect our bargaining unit employees. They deserve nothing less.

There is a fight brewing in February as we make our annual pilgrimage to Washington D.C. to discuss your concerns with our elected representatives. They range from the increase in the cost of living paired with long hours exacerbated by managers who have rewarded our members

See CHALLENGES, page 3

2023: AFGE’s year of victories

By AFGE Leadership

2023 is over. Looking back, we have so many things to celebrate. Whether it’s organizing, representation, contract negotiation, lobbying, AFGE at all levels did an amazing job empowering our members.

As the largest labor union representing federal and D.C. government employees, AFGE is proud to have played a major role in improving the lives of government workers – the people who keep our country running, especially during political turmoil and uncertainty.

The new year has begun, and our work ensuring strong workers’ rights

will continue. In the meantime, let’s celebrate our victories, big and small, and continue to inspire each other as we’ve done for over 90 years.

Here are some of the highlights of our victories in 2023:

1. TSA officers won a historic 31% pay increase, the largest in TSA history

After two decades of fighting for fair compensation for a group of workers who protect our skies and air travelers, our hard work finally paid off. Transportation Security Officers received their first pay increase of up to 31 percent in July, putting them on a scale similar to General Schedule pay.

AFGE and our TSA council’s persistence also led to more workplace rights similar to Title 5 for the TSA officers.

2. An additional 33,000 feds will get a locality pay bump in 2024, thanks to AFGE

Federal employees working in Fresno, Calif.; Reno, Nev.; Rochester, New York; and Spokane, Wash., are slated to get a locality pay raise next year as the Office of Personnel Management took one of the final steps to implement the new General Schedule pay localities.

New counties also will be added to 43 existing localities, so those working and living in these counties will get a

locality pay bump as well. The changes mean about 32,900 federal workers will see a locality pay raise starting on the first pay period after Jan. 1, 2024.

This is a direct result of AFGE pushing the Biden administration to adopt the Federal Salary Council’s pro-labor recommendations that would increase pay for tens of thousands of General Schedule employees who are making 24% less than employees outside the federal government doing similar jobs in the same areas.

3. We broke so many organizing records as government workers

See VICTORIES, page 3

Prepare now for academic development

By MARISA ALIA-NOVOBILSKI
Air Force Materiel Command

Whether individuals want to grow functional expertise or hone leadership skills for the future, the Department of the Air Force Civilian Development Academic Year 2025 has a program for everyone.

Air Force Materiel Command civilians are encouraged to start now to prepare for the upcoming Civilian Development application cycle, Jan. 10 to Feb.16.

“There are programs for individuals at every stage of their professional career,” said Crystal Riego, AFMC Civilian Development program lead. “Whether you want to obtain a degree, develop leadership and supervisory skills, or become a better technician in your profession, there is a program for you.”

Aligned with the Department of the Air Force’s institutional competencies, Civilian Development programs are designed to ensure individuals succeed in today’s dynamic operational environment. Civilians can apply to Professional Military Education, academic programs, fellowships, experiential assignments or programs, leadership seminars and short courses, and more.

“The Civilian Development portfolio offerings align with the DAF’s ‘Civilians We Need’ career model, which has distinct paths for individuals looking to be enterprise leaders or functional experts in their chosen field,” said Riego. “Individuals can review the career roadmaps alongside program offerings with their supervisors to determine the best programs for their needs.”

There are 42 different Civilian Development programs offered for Academic Year 2025, including several new initiatives.

These range from

See DEVELOPMENT, page 3

Department of the Air Force			
Civilian Career Roadmap for Functional Experts/Leaders			
BASIC		INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED/EXPERT
(GS 1-4)			(GS 15)
EXPERIENCE	Develop entry-level technical depth/proficiency and relevant mission knowledge in primary discipline	Further hone technical depth and mission knowledge in primary discipline; seek breadth within functional area of expertise in local area	Gain advanced technical expertise and pursue breadth as relevant within functional area of expertise
	Establish record of sustained high performance	Gain experience at sustained high performance levels and at increasing levels of responsibility, impact, and mission accomplishment	Develop record of superior accomplishments that align to Functional/Technical Qualifications
	Seek technical experience at Flight, Squadron, Delta, or Wing levels in multiple positions to establish depth of knowledge	Seek further technical experience and depth development in primary/related functions at Installation, Group, or MAJCOM/FIELDCOM levels (if available in local area)	Gain advanced technical expertise in primary discipline to develop into a recognized functional expert; Seek managerial experience within functional area
EDUCATION & TRAINING	Associate's Degree or Bachelor's Degree (if series requires) in primary functional discipline	Bachelor's Degree in primary functional discipline	Master's or Doctoral Degree in functional area of expertise
	Basic technical training in primary functional discipline	Intermediate technical training in primary functional discipline	Advanced Functional Training in primary functional discipline
	Basic leadership training as applicable to functional field (e.g., DCELP)	Intermediate Leadership Training as applicable to functional field (e.g., OLC, LWI, M&ST)	Senior Leadership Training specific to effectively leading people/organizations within primary functional discipline (e.g., CLC, EIG, LETC, LCI, LS, NISLS, UEL)
	Achieve Required Functional Certification(s) for level, if applicable (e.g. EIT, DAWIA, SPeD, DFMC, SCWDP, Cyber etc.)	Achieve Required Functional Certification(s) for level, if applicable	Achieve Required Functional Certification(s) for level (if applicable)
LEADERSHIP	Basic Developmental Education (e.g., SOS) is optional and may be obtained via non-resident distance learning*	Intermediate Developmental Education (e.g., ACSC, ACSC On-line Masters, ACSC-SSS, SANDS, SAASS) is optional and may be obtained via non-resident distance learning*	Senior Developmental Education (e.g., CIC) is optional and may be obtained via non-resident distance learning*
	Seek mentors/coaches within functional area	Expand mentor and coaching relationships	Mentor/Coach within functional area of expertise
	Gain experience in leading teams and/or projects within functional area	Gain supervisory and/or additional leadership experience in functional area; Obtain initial/recurring supervisory training, if applicable	Gain leadership/managerial experience within functional area; Obtain recurring leadership/management training
	Assess foundational competencies; develop plan to address gaps within functional area of expertise	Obtain 180/360 degree feedback and address gap areas	Partner with a coach to further hone ability to lead within functional area of expertise
FOUNDATIONAL COMPETENCIES			
Establish professional network within functional area	Further expand your professional network within functional area	As a recognized DAF functional expert, build and maintain relationships across DoD within area of expertise	
Join/participate in professional orgs related to technical area of expertise	Serve/lead professional org committees related to technical area of expertise	Serve as tech advisor or Board member for professional organizations related to technical expertise	
Developing Self Developing Ideas Developing Others Developing Organizations			
*Academic prerequisites apply - Details available on MyPERS			
**Roadmap represents desired attributes			

Department of the Air Force Civilian Career Roadmap for Enterprise Leaders				
	TACTICAL (GS 1-4/eqv)		OPERATIONAL	STRATEGIC (GS 15)
EXPERIENCE	Develop technical depth/proficiency and relevant mission knowledge	Further hone technical depth and mission knowledge; seek breadth within functional area of expertise	Gain advanced technical expertise and pursue further breadth across functional lines	
	Establish record of sustained high performance	Gain experience at sustained high performance levels and at increasing levels of responsibility, impact, and mission accomplishment	Develop record of superior accomplishments that align to Technical Qualifications and Executive Core Qualifications	
	Obtain entry-level experience in primary discipline	Gain experience in related functions and explore organizational and geographic mobility to include career broadening assignments	Gain broadening experience (e.g., cross-functional career broadening, KCP, etc.)	
EDUCATION & TRAINING	Seek experience at Flight, Squadron, Delta, Wing levels	Seek experience at MAJCOM, FIELDCOM, HQ levels	Gain managerial experience at strategic level (e.g., HAF/SAF, other Services, CCMD, OSD, Joint, or Defense Agency)	
	Associate's Degree or Bachelor's Degree (if series requires)	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree in primary functional discipline and/or Leadership/Management	
	Basic technical training in primary functional discipline	Intermediate technical training in primary functional discipline AND appropriate balance of functional and leadership/management training	Advanced technical training in primary functional discipline and related fields AND appropriate balance of functional and leadership/management training	
LEADERSHIP	Basic leadership training (e.g., DCELP)	Intermediate Leadership Training (e.g., OLC, ELDP, LWI, M&ST)	Senior Leader/Executive Development (e.g., CLC, ELS, EPS, EIG, LCI, LS, NISLS, UEL, LETC)	
	Achieve Required Functional Certification(s) for level, if applicable (e.g., EIT, DAWIA, SPeD, DFMCP, SCWDP, Cyber etc.)	Achieve Required Functional Certification(s) for level (if applicable); Pursue other certifications beyond primary discipline	Achieve Required Functional Certification(s); Pursue Other Certifications (e.g., additional functional and/or leadership/management certs)	
	Basic Developmental Education (In-Residence or Non-Resident Distance Learning) (e.g., SOS)*	Intermediate Developmental Education (In-Residence or Non-Resident Distance Learning) (e.g., ACSC, ACSC On-line Masters, ACSC-SSS, SANDS, SAASS)*	Senior Developmental Education (In-Residence or Non-Resident Distance Learning) (e.g., AWC, AWC-WSS, DSLDP, ES, ES SAC, NWC)*	
FOUNDATIONAL COMPETENCIES	Seek mentors and/or coaches	Expand mentor and coaching relationships both within/beyond functional area	Mentor/Coach both within/beyond functional area	
	Gain experience in leading teams and/or projects	Gain supervisory and/or additional leadership experience; Obtain initial/recurring supervisory training, if applicable	Gain leadership/managerial experience within/beyond functional area; Obtain recurring leadership/management training	
	Assess foundational competencies; develop plan to address gaps	Obtain 180/360 degree feedback and address gap areas	Partner with a coach	
	Establish professional network within functional area	Further expand your professional network within/beyond functional area	Build and maintain relationships across DoD and with other federal and private sector agencies	
	Join/participate in professional orgs	Serve/lead professional org committees	Serve on professional organization Board of Directors	
FOUNDATIONAL COMPETENCIES				
Developing Self Developing Ideas Developing Others Developing Organizations				
*Academic prerequisites apply - Details available on MyPERS				
**Roadmap represents desired attributes				



Photo courtesy Jason Kindig

Closing the STEM skills gap, expanding opportunities

(StatePoint) Over the next decade, it's projected that nearly 3.5 million manufacturing and STEM-related jobs will be available, yet 2 million are expected to go unfilled due to a skills gap, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics.

Advocates are addressing systemic educational barriers that impact student success in order to fill this skills gap and expand opportunities for young people.

That's the idea behind Driving Possibilities, a \$110 million STEM career readiness and community engagement initiative of the Toyota USA Foundation. Its unique approach brings industry and academia together, while coordinating nonprofit services that address barriers and societal disparities—all to prepare youth for successful futures.

"From machine learning and connected technologies to autonomous vehicles and electrification, the career opportunities of tomorrow will be boundless for those with STEM skills. During this time of rapid industry advancement, it's more important than ever to give all young people an equal opportunity to access rewarding careers in high-growth industries tomorrow," says Colleen Casey, executive director, Driving Possibilities.

With the goal of increasing student awareness, excitement and interest in STEM learning, the multi-pronged approach of Driving Possibilities includes innovative, hands-on STEM programming from pre-K to 12th grade levels, professional and leadership development for teachers, and industry exposure and mentorship opportunities for students.

The program also addresses students' essential needs to ensure they have the food, transportation, mental health services, after-school programming and early intervention literacy support they need to succeed.

This long-term initiative is already making a huge impact for thousands of families in such high-need locations near Toyota's operations in Michigan, Kentucky, Indiana and Alabama.

And while the program looks a little different in each location because it is based on the unique needs of each community, the mission remains the same: to level the playing field for students facing educational barriers. To learn more, visit toyotaeffect.com.

"Young people are tomorrow's problem-solvers, makers and innovators. But they can face many roadblocks on their journey. Listening to what students need and then working within their communities to come up with solutions, will contribute to thriving communities, stronger local economies and limitless possibilities for all," says Casey.

Why you shouldn't brush off the dentist this year

(StatePoint) When scheduling annual physicals, screenings, vaccinations and other preventive care, don't forget about another critical part of overall health that gets neglected all too often: dental care.

A recent study from the National Library of Medicine revealed that nearly half of American adults postponed their scheduled dental visits during the pandemic.

Even prior to the public health emergency, at least one-third of U.S. adults didn't see their dentist annually.

"Now is a great time to schedule an appointment with your dentist," says Dr. Cary Sun, chief dental officer, Cigna Healthcare.

"Brushing off dental care can have serious implications for your health and wellness. Even forgoing recommended teeth cleanings can lead to gingivitis, gum disease and cavities. This can also escalate into bigger problems, like the need for root canals or crowns, or even tooth loss."

Even with dental insurance, extensive treatments can amount to thousands of dollars in out-of-pocket expenses, compared to little or no out-of-pocket expense for preventive care, such as exams and cleanings.

A recent study found that high out-of-pocket costs are the top reason people delay dental care — a good reason to see the dentist for an annual checkup sooner rather than later.

Studies also show that oral health has connections to overall health, including an impact on cardiovascular health. Research links gum disease to inflammation that can come before heart attacks, strokes and sudden vascular events, according to Penn Medicine.

With all this in mind, review your dental plan for available benefits. Don't have dental insurance? Dental plans can be purchased year-round and there are many affordable options. If you have a comprehensive plan through your job, it may cover care such as exams and



Photo source: iStock via Getty Images Plus

See DENTIST, page 3

It's time to care about long-term care

(StatePoint) While many people picture retirement as an opportunity to relax, retirees can face many challenges, including the potential need for long-term care.

A 2022 report from the Department of Health and Human Services projects that over half (56%) of Americans turning 65 today will develop a disability serious enough to require long-term care and, for some, the costs of long-term care may impact their retirement savings.

Long-term care refers to a range of services and support designed to meet needs associated with Activities of Daily Living (ADL) like bathing, dressing or eating. Options for such care include in-home care, assisted living facilities and nursing homes.

"As the saying goes, 'If you fail to plan, you plan to fail,'" says Jared Nepa, senior vice president, head of Life and MoneyGuard distribution, Lincoln Financial Group. "Many people wait until they're older to begin long-term care planning. As the need for long-term care and the associated costs continue to rise, there are advantages to starting to plan when you're younger and healthier."

Newly released data from VERSTA Research and Lincoln Financial Group (the marketing name for Lincoln National Corporation and its affiliates) explores the attitudes of American consumers and financial professionals around long-term care. Based on the survey responses, Lincoln recommends asking yourself the following questions:



Photo source: iStock via Getty Images Plus

See CARE, page 3

Joining a gym? Avoid new year fraud in 2024

The beginning of a new year is often associated with increased interest in gym memberships, at-home workout equipment and programs designed around living a healthier lifestyle. As consumers recover from holiday celebrations, including holiday dinners typically more robust than the standard fare, the new year offers plenty of opportunities to help shed those extra servings of stuffing.

However, it is important to remain mindful of con artists who take advantage of shopper trends for their own gain and keep realistic fitness goals that consumers can carry throughout the year.

Rather than signing up for fitness classes at a local gym, many consumers may decide to purchase at-home equipment to exercise. For the past five years, Internet searches for 'workout equipment' peak during January.

As is typical in the new year, BBB is expecting an increase in reports of fraudulent businesses advertising the sale of workout equipment that is either never received or of poor quality.

In January 2021, one consumer reported a loss of \$2,100 when purchasing an elliptical workout machine online. After paying for the equipment via Amazon pay, the consumer reported they "received no confirmation or contact of any kind. I received no response when emailing the company."

In addition to the challenges presented by unethical and fraudulent businesses, consumers interested in improving their physical health in the new year must also assess their fitness goals and determine their priorities when choosing a gym membership or at-home system.

BBB provides the following tips to get the most out of your new year fitness goals:

Ask questions about limited free trials. Gyms often give a one-week free pass for potential members, and at-home programs provide a trial period to allow consumers to determine if it is the right fit for their fitness goals. If interested in a gym membership, spend the time



Kelvin Collins

to realistically determine what time of the day you would be available to dedicate toward exercise and visit the gym during these times to see how crowded it is or if there is a wait for equipment you would typically use in your workout routine.

Check to see if limited trials are offered for any classes or specialized programs.

Don't feel coerced. Do not give in to high-pressure sales tactics to join a workout program immediately or make a purchase online without first researching the seller or business. A reputable gym or program will give you enough time to read the contract thoroughly, tour the facilities and make an informed decision.

Be especially wary of claims that seem too good to be true, such as a guarantee of losing a large amount of weight extremely quickly.

Calculate the trust costs. Gyms and at-home workout programs often use introductory offers to encourage new members, especially in the new year. However, the price could go up more than you budgeted once the initial period is over.

Make sure to read the contract carefully and understand the regular monthly fees and what they include.

Take a tour. If choosing a gym membership, take the time to tour the facility and make sure the gym has the equipment, classes and trainers you need or expect. Pay attention to the things that are important to you, whether that is the cleanliness of the showers or the availability of Wi-Fi.

Ask questions and make sure you understand the gym's policies, procedures and how

See GYM, page 3

Medal of Honor spotlight

Navy Ensign Charles Hammann

By KATIE LANGE
DoD News

Navy Ensign Charles Hazeltine Hammann was one of the first U.S. military aviators who went to battle when the country entered World War I, so it's fitting that his heroics in the skies over Europe made him the first aviator to earn the Medal of Honor.

Hammann was born March 16, 1892, in Baltimore, to parents Jacob and Elizabeth Hammann. He had a brother, Edward, and a sister named Lillian.

Called "Haze" by his friends, thanks to his middle name, Hammann played high school football at Baltimore Polytechnic Institute before graduating in 1910. He spent a few years working in business, including for a brewing company, before joining the Naval Reserve's Flying Corps in 1917.

Hammann learned how to fly at the Navy's only air station at the time, which was in Pensacola, Florida. He then sailed to France in June 1917. Over the next year, he got a lot of flight time under his belt and even learned how to

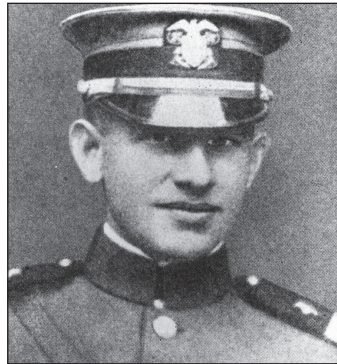


Photo courtesy defense.gov

Navy Ensign Charles Hammann

do stunt piloting, according to a letter he wrote home to his brother.

By the spring of 1918, Hammann was sent to Italy to join the fight. On Aug. 21, he and three other pilots were sent on a patrol over an Austro-Hungarian naval base near the enemy stronghold of Pola, in modern-day Croatia. The pilots were flying Italian Macchi seaplanes when enemy aircraft came after them.

In the middle of the dogfight, the airplane of the lead pilot, Ensign George Ludlow, was hit by anti-aircraft fire. According to a 1938 Baltimore Sun article, the plane nosedived about 12,000 feet before leveling off and landing safely

in the water.

Hammann immediately did his best to dodge the remaining enemy aircraft to attempt a rescue. He dove down and landed on the water close to the disabled plane and took Ludlow onboard, even though his aircraft wasn't designed to hold two people.

Hammann put Ludlow under the motor, a 1918 Baltimore Sun article said, before taking off again. The extra weight caused the plane to sway and strain with effort, but when enemy aircraft came for them, Hammann was still able to turn his machine guns in their direction, which caused them to flee.

Hammann's overweight aircraft almost made it back to Naval Air Station Porto Corsini in northeast Italy before it fully broke down. The plane fell into the water right off the coast. Hammann and Ludlow had to swim to shore — but they made it.

Two months after the incident, Hammann was commissioned as an ensign. He returned from overseas in January 1919.

Unfortunately, Hammann's life was cut short a few months later. The 27-year-old was killed on June 14 during a Flag Day celebration at Langley Field in Hampton, Virginia.

According to a 1938 Baltimore Sun article, he was stunting in an aircraft when it went into a tailspin and crashed.

Hammann is buried in Oak Lawn Cemetery in Baltimore. Hammann was nominated

See HONOR, page 3

Hammann's overweight aircraft almost made it back to Naval Air Station Porto Corsini in northeast Italy before it fully broke down. The plane fell into the water right off the coast.

THE UNION ADVOCATE

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Please submit articles, photos, etc to don.moncrief@afge-local-987.org. For questions about story content, to pass on story ideas or to request coverage, please contact the aforementioned.

CHALLENGES

From page 3

with minimum punishment for an outstanding job. Amidst the poorly written appraisals by supervisors who have been provided with absolution for their antics and inability to clearly articulate the hard work into a coherent report that captures your outstanding performance.

To add insult to injury the grievance process has morphed into the “just say no” to most if not all grievances - thus the large number of arbitration cases.

Legislation, 2024 Elections, there has never been any attempt to encourage you to vote one way or another. I will tell you

that your vote is sacred. Never let anyone take it for granted.

There are ongoing efforts to fix the unfair penalty that reduced earned Social Security benefits of Civil Service retirees and enabling employees to buy back time for retirement purposes once converted to career. These are but a few issues of concern.

We will be proactive in the 2024 elections with an eye towards our jobs, as well as protecting workers’ rights. Vote the issues impacting your families and you.

2023 can best be described as the year of the Unions. There were key labor gains for Hollywood, UPS, Kiser Permanente, Amazon and Blue

Bird. With the labor gains some call it the great reset - a unique set of circumstances that has galvanized a resurgence in the labor movement.

You ask how does this impact you as federal sector worker? There are those in the labor movement who understand that our plight is inextricably linked to the challenges they faced and have turned the corner in where there were efforts to eliminate the labor movement. We have been successful in beating back the denial of your right to appeal a proposed termination, eliminating the merit system protection board. These rights to appeal a termination is as important to you as having a payday.

We must commit to Non-Stop Organizing. There must be a concerted effort on the part of every member to encourage non-members that there is a place for them in Local 987.

There is strength in numbers. It is vital to building greater worker labor power. We are in a movement and not a moment. We are organizing to ensure that if your kids, kids’ kids want employment with Robins AFB, that there are well-paying jobs available to them. Your participation, creativity, and ideas are welcomed and needed to build our union power as we look forward to a busy year.

There is a Rising Tied in union Pride ... Union Strong All Day Long.

VICTORIES

From page 1

flocked to join AFGE

More and more government workers are joining the AFGE family because they want to have a say in their working conditions, where changes are not just shoved down their throats but are negotiated and fairly implemented. We saw that trend in 2023.

Thanks to changes in organizing strategies where we emphasized worker power and one-on-one conversations, we scored net increases for several months in a row.

In March, for example, we added 5,652 new members – far surpassing our goal of recruiting at least 3,500 members a month. Factoring in members who retired, changed jobs, or otherwise left the union, we ended the month with a net gain of 1,446, the highest since June 2016, pushing overall membership to the highest total since September 2021.

By July, our union already reached our goal of achieving a net gain of 8,000 members in 2023.

The historic pay increase at TSA continued to drive TSA officers to join. Member mobilization also has delivered great new collective bargaining agreements for the Department of Veterans Affairs and Social Security Administration.

4. We won big on election night

AFGE successfully got our endorsed candidates elected left and right on Nov. 7 in states where key issues were decided, setting the stage for the presidential election next year!

We worked hard for months to get out the vote and educate union members on why these races were important to them and their families. We knocked on doors, we texted, we phone banked, we mailed materials, and our efforts paid off.

In Kentucky, for example, AFGE-endorsed Governor Andy Beshear was re-elected to a second term. In Virginia, we helped flip the House of Delegates and hold onto the State Senate as AFGE-endorsed candidates up and down the ballot won.

This helps dim Governor Youngkin’s aspirations for higher office and his anti-labor policies, including his proposed change to eliminate labor history from Virginia’s educational curriculum.

5. The 2023 full-year, catch-all bill with AFGE priorities became law

Thanks to AFGE members and staff’s hard work and perseverance, the full-year fiscal 2023 funding bill that became law in January contained several provisions that made it easier for government workers to provide services to the American people. Several agencies received increased funding to implement new laws and fund staffing increases to meet new demands.

A few highlights of the bill:

■ At the VA, the bill not only included a 22% increase in funding for VA health care but also defunded the AIR Commission that would have considered closing or eliminating services at hundreds of VA facilities.

■ At the Department of Defense, the bill limited DoD’s ability to put personnel caps on the civilian workforce and reduce the number of civilians. It also limits conversions of civilian jobs to military and contract performance. The president’s budget proposed eliminating this provision, so its inclusion is a very significant victory.

The bill also included language continuing the governmentwide moratorium on conducting public-private job competitions under the OMB A-76 Circular, which helps protect most federal civilian jobs from being outsourced.

■ At the Bureau of Prisons, retiring law enforcement officers can now access savings without penalty. The Protecting Public Safety Employees Timely Retirement Act, which was included in the catch all funding bill, allowed eligible law enforcement and public safety officers to make penalty-free withdrawals on their Thrift Saving Plan savings once they attain 25 years of service in a covered retirement plan or when they turn 50 years old, whichever is earlier.

The new law was one of the AFGE Council of Prisons Locals’ priorities.

■ At TSA, the bill included hundreds of millions of dollars to implement the new pay system as well as hire and retain TSOs.

■ At the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, funding was provided for refugee operations so that they are no longer fee-funded from citizenship and visa applications, which led to the threat of furloughs in 2020.

6. AFGE scored a major victory at the Supreme Court in a case involving dual-status National Guard technicians

AFGE represents more than 32,000 National Guard dual-status technicians in every state except Mississippi, and 2023 turned out to be a good year for them as the Supreme Court in May ruled in favor of the union, preserving collective bargaining rights for dual-status technicians working for National Guards in a civilian role. AFGE’s General Counsel Office argued the case for our union.

The case was appealed to the Supreme Court by the Ohio National Guard, which in 2016 unilaterally ended a collective bargaining agreement with AFGE Local 3970 when its then contract expired.

Despite a more than 40-year history of bargaining with AFGE and its dual status technicians, Ohio claimed that technicians had no collective bargaining rights and that it was not bound by the Federal Service Labor Management Relations Statute.

7. AFGE launched a new local to represent federal workers in Europe

It has been a long time coming, but AFGE in 2023 launched a new local that seeks to cover more than 10,000 federal employees working for U.S. agencies in Europe who currently lack a collective voice at work. The new local was formed under AFGE District 14, which already represents small pockets of federal employees working in Europe.

Membership in the new at-large local is open to federal employees throughout Europe at any agency who are not already represented by an AFGE local. Employees can be under the General Schedule, Wage Grade, or Non-Appropriated Fund pay systems. Most federal employees in Europe work for the Defense Department at military hospitals, child care centers, commissaries and exchanges, as firefighters, and in combat support and logistics.

8. AFGE continued to win union elections, protect workers’ rights

More and more federal workers are forming a union under AFGE to have a voice at work. Employees at the Millennium Challenge Corporation, for example, have voted to form a union with AFGE as their representation.

At the National Park Service’s Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina, employees voted to continue representation by AFGE, rejecting efforts to decertify the AFGE local and take away workers’ rights and protections.

A discovery that remote workers at an Environmental Protection Agency facility in Ann Arbor, Mich., were about to get kicked out of the bargaining unit led an AFGE local to spring into action and save the employees’ workplace rights. AFGE Local 3907 subsequently held union elections for 19 remote workers, and the employees voted for AFGE and therefore did not lose their union protection.

9. VA agreed to roll over the contract, the largest in government

AFGE’s National VA Council and the Department of Veterans Affairs agreed to roll over the remainder of the union’s 2011 master collective bargaining agreement for the next three years and modernize VA hiring procedures. The agreement marks the end of a five-and-a-half-year struggle between AFGE and VA that began with the former administration’s reopening of the contract in December 2017.

10. We won a contract for 42,000 SSA employees

42,000 Social Security Administration (SSA) employees have an updated contract in November following the employees’ ratification vote in October.

AFGE and SSA in July agreed on updates to six articles of the contract, originally ratified in 2019, covering such issues as employee training and career development, employee rights, childcare and elder care, disciplinary and adverse actions, and employee details to alternative duty stations.

The updated six-year contract not only benefits employees but also the American public they serve as several provisions directly affect customer services.

11. We won 25% retention bonuses for BOP officers at 8 severely understaffed prisons

AFGE and the union’s Council of Prison Locals have been calling on the administration to approve the additional pay to help address dangerous understaffing at federal prisons.

Our hard work paid off when the Biden administration authorized 25% retention bonuses for correctional officers and staff at eight federal correctional facilities overseen by the Federal Bureau of Prisons: Federal Correctional Institution Dublin, Calif.; FCI Herlong, Calif.; Metropolitan Correctional Center San Diego, Calif.; Metropolitan Detention Center Los Angeles, Calif.; United States Penitentiary Atwater, Calif.; Federal Correctional Complex Florence, Colorado; FCI Sheridan, Oregon; and Federal Detention Center SeaTac, Washington.

12. AFGE now represents workers at DHA in 18 locations. AFGE filed certification requests with the Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA) seeking to represent all health care workers who have transferred from other military services to the new Defense Health Agency (DHA). It took a year and a half, but AFGE has so far won the FLRA’s decisions to represent workers in 17 markets and headquarters.

These employees are part of the 45,000 civilian bargaining unit employees who have been transferred to DHA as part of the largest reorganization in the Defense Department since 1947.

Most of the transferred employees had been represented by AFGE locals when they were with the military services.

13. Martin O’Malley is confirmed as SSA commissioner

The Senate Dec. 18 voted to confirm AFGE-endorsed O’Malley to be the next SSA commissioner. AFGE and our SSA General Committee endorsed O’Malley when he was nominated by President Biden back in August.

SSA is an agency in crisis, so we urged the Senate to confirm the former Maryland governor based on his prior commitments to strengthen and expand Social Security and his successful, data-driven approach to improving government at both the city and state level.

CARE

From page 2

What are my personal experiences with long-term care?

Three out of five (60%) Americans surveyed have provided care or have a close contact who has. Four out of five (80%) of those unpaid caregivers admit they didn’t know how demanding caregiving would be and agree that long-term care insurance would have made their role easier.

Do I know the care costs for the area in which I plan to retire?

The cost of care can vary greatly across the United States and a long-term care event could have a significant financial impact. Just one-third of consumers (32%) see long-term care as one of the biggest risks to their retirement savings while half of financial professionals surveyed (50%) cite it as the top concern.

What role do I envision my family or friends playing when it comes to an extended care need?

The majority (80%) of

Americans surveyed shared that even if they had a professional long-term caregiver, they would want a family member to help manage their care. If you have an expectation for caregiving support, have you discussed it with your loved ones and agreed on a plan?

Have I incorporated potential long-term care costs into my retirement planning

Only a third of survey respondents (36%) feel confident they will have the financial resources to pay for potential long-term care expenses. With a variety of funding solutions available to mitigate long-term care risk, a financial professional can help you develop a comprehensive plan. In fact, most financial professionals surveyed (94%) shared that their clients who have planned for long-term care expenses feel more confident about their financial future.

Taking stock of your situation, talking to your family and planning now can help ensure everyone is prepared for the emotional and financial decisions that may arise in the years ahead.

DENTIST

From page 2

cleanings, and other necessary treatments like crowns, root canals, gum therapy, extractions and orthodontics (braces).

If you are between jobs or self-employed and are in need of a dental plan, online tools can help you comparison shop, and brokers can help you purchase an individual dental plan. You can also contact insurers directly to learn more about their options for individuals.

Finally, if you are afraid to see a dentist – which millions of Americans are – there are

plenty of ways to address that, too. Many dentists accommodate fearful patients, offering headphones, sunglasses and other items to soothe anxieties. There are also new approaches, such as teledentistry, that allow you to see a dentist at home through imaging and communication technologies. This doesn’t replace in-person care, but can help allay dental fears.

“It’s a perfect time to take control of your oral health. Innovations in dental care make it easier than ever to gain peace of mind from a checkup, or to catch the little problems before they become major, painful and expensive ones,” says Sun.

GYM

From page 2

they maintain their equipment.

Determine your fitness goals. Determining realistic fitness goals allows you to choose a facility or workout program that is most appropriate for you and will prevent you from failing to follow through with your workout resolution for the rest of the year.

Be sure to consult with the physician before embarking on a new fitness regimen, especially if there are medical conditions that might be of concern.

Figure out your priorities. What exactly are you looking for in a gym membership or at-home program? Is it a convenient location near your home or a chain with numerous locations around the country that you can go to while traveling?

Answering these questions

will help you determine the best fit for your lifestyle and fitness goals.

Understand the terms. Read the contract carefully before signing and make sure that all verbal promises made by a salesperson are in writing. Pay close attention to the cancellation and renewal policies.

Some gyms may charge a cancellation fee if moving or will automatically renew your contract at the end of its term.

Use a credit card when shopping online. BBB strongly recommends using a credit card for all online purchases rather than a debit card, wire transfer or mobile banking app transaction. In case of a fraudulent seller or business purchase, credit cards offer additional protection and the ability to cancel charges than other forms of payment.

Visit BBB.org for more tips on how to have a fraud-free new year.

Signing up for text alerts from AFGE is “as easy as one, two, three.”

Enter “225568” in the “To” field. Type “AFGE” in the “Message” field and press “send”.

UNION MEMBERSHIP is like a gym membership.

Dues are paid to be part of a group with similar interests and goals.

But, just like a gym, if we don't show up, invest our time – or participate, we do not get STRONGER.

Unions are workers joining together to lift the standard of living for all. on facebook & twitter
f unions4workers

DEVELOPMENT

From page 1

short courses to long-term residency programs.

An Executive Core Qualifications course will help

aspiring Senior Executive Staff applicants better understand the application and portfolio process. Similarly, the Technical Qualifications course focuses on application preparation for individuals seeking senior-level scientific and professional posi-

tions in the physical, biological, medical, and engineering sciences or related fields.

To learn more visit the Force Development mFSS page at <https://myfss.us.af.mil/USAFCommunity/s/knowledge-detail?xid=13085>. AFMC

individuals can also review the information at AFMC - Annual Civilian Development Call (dps.mil) (Common Access Card required). Applicants must apply through MyVector and should coordinate with their supervisors before applying.

HONOR

From page 2

for the Medal of Honor before he died; however, it wasn't made available to his family until November 1920.

Newspaper coverage at the time showed the holdup was due to a Congressional investi-

gation into injustice within the Navy regarding the service's manner of distributing recognition of distinguished war-time service.

According to the Naval History and Heritage Command, Hammann was the first U.S. aviator of any service to receive the Medal of Honor. His August 1918 heroics also earned him

the Silver Medal for Military Valor from the king of Italy and the Italian War Cross.

Hammann's name has not been forgotten within the Navy or in his hometown. A monument to the aviator and another Baltimore World War I Medal of Honor recipient, Army Private Henry Gilbert Costin, was erected in the city's down-

town in 1939.

During World War II, there were actually two warships named for him. The first USS Hammann was a destroyer launched in 1939, but it was sunk in early 1942 during the Battle of Midway. Later that same year, a commissioned destroyer escort was renamed as the second USS Hammann.

Know as They Grow



Photos courtesy of Shutterstock

How birth defects affect each stage of life

FAMILY FEATURES

Birth defects, structural changes that affect one or more parts of the body, are the leading cause of infant mortality. A baby is born with a birth defect every 4.5 minutes, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC).

Birth defects most often develop during the first three months of pregnancy, when a baby’s organs are forming. Not only can they affect mortality, but they can also cause problems for a baby’s overall health and how the body develops and functions. Common birth defects include congenital heart defects, cleft lip, cleft palate and spina bifida.

Genetics, behaviors and social and environmental factors can impact the risk for birth defects, and not all birth defects can be prevented. To help improve the lives of people living with birth defects, consider this information from the experts at March of Dimes, who aim to provide knowledge about what birth defects are, how to prevent them and their impact across all stages of life.

Pregnancy

Although not all birth defects can be prevented, people can increase their chances of having a healthy baby by managing health conditions and adopting healthy behaviors before becoming pregnant.

When planning a pregnancy, see a health care professional and start prenatal care as soon as possible. Talk about taking any medications you’re currently taking (or might need during the pregnancy), including vitamins. Most doctors recommend women take 400 micrograms of folic acid every day before and during pregnancy to help prevent birth defects.

Also discuss vaccinations (including COVID-19, since pregnant women are at elevated risk for severe COVID-19 illness) and other medical concerns, such as how to manage diabetes. Avoid overheating and treat fevers and infections promptly. Avoid alcohol, smoking cigarettes and marijuana or other drugs during pregnancy.

Infancy

If your baby is diagnosed with a birth defect during pregnancy, or born with a birth defect or other health condition, he or she may need special care to

aid growth and development. Many children with birth defects lead long and happy lives. However, birth defects remain critical conditions that can cause lifelong challenges.

Advancements such as improved newborn screening and early detection of birth defects can help pinpoint potential problems and ensure the baby begins receiving supportive care for better survival rates and quality of life. Examples include newborn screenings for critical congenital heart defects and monitoring bladder and kidney function in infants and children with spina bifida.

Childhood

Meeting the complex needs of a person with birth defects involves the whole family and can be challenging at times. Finding resources, knowing what to expect and planning for the future can help. Early intervention services and support include special education, speech therapy and physical therapy. These can have a significant impact on a child’s ability to learn new skills, overcome challenges and increase success in school and life.

Some babies born with birth defects may also have physical and intellectual disabilities. The exact ages of developmental milestones are different for each child. Families, educators and health care providers can work together to set meaningful goals and create a plan to help children living with birth defects reach their full potential.

Adolescence

Adolescents and young adults living with birth defects may face unique challenges as they transition from childhood to adulthood. They may need to navigate changes in insurance and transition from a familiar pediatric specialist to a new adult doctor. It’s important for people with birth defects and their families to begin planning for this transition during childhood so they can lead healthy, independent lives as adults.

Other areas of focus might include medications, surgeries and other procedures; mental health; social development and relationships within and outside the family; physical activity; and independence.



Adulthood

With every pregnancy, a woman starts out with a 3% chance of having a baby with a birth defect, regardless of underlying health conditions or lifestyle factors, according to the CDC.

Many women with birth defects and other health conditions have healthy, uneventful pregnancies. However, women with birth defects may be more likely to have a baby with a birth defect. People living with birth defects should talk with their health care providers before becoming pregnant about how a pregnancy might affect them and their baby.

Having someone in your family with a birth defect also increases your chances of having a baby with a birth defect. To learn more about your genetic risk of having a baby with a birth defect, talk with a clinical geneticist or a genetic counselor.

Learn more about birth defects by following [#EveryJourneyMatters](#) and [#BirthDefects](#) on social media and visiting [marchofdimes.org/birthdefects](#).

Tips to Prevent Birth Defects

Not all birth defects can be prevented, but you can help reduce the risk and increase your chances of having a healthy baby by following these steps.

- Get a preconception checkup before you start trying to get pregnant.
- Ensure your vaccinations are up to date. Some vaccinations protect you from infections that can cause birth defects and updating certain vaccinations may mean you need to wait before trying to become pregnant.
- Take a vitamin supplement that includes 400 micrograms of folic acid every day.
- Learn about your family health history. If you, your partner, your children or

someone in your families has a birth defect, you may want to see a genetic counselor to learn more about your risk.

- Work with your health care provider to manage chronic health conditions, such as diabetes.
- Talk to your health care provider about medicines you take, including any prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, supplements and herbal products. Certain medicines may increase your baby’s risk of a birth defect.
- Reach a healthy weight. Being obese can increase your baby’s chances of having birth defects like neural tube defects, heart defects and cleft palate.

Solve Busy Weeknights with Simple, Satisfying Meals

FAMILY FEATURES

Juggling those weeknight responsibilities including homework, catching up on emails, after-school activities, social events and more can leave families scrambling when it comes time for dinner. When your busy schedule leaves little time to spend in the kitchen, turn to family favorites you can put on the table in 20 minutes or less to give loved ones the fuel they need without sacrificing taste or quality.

Take Taco Tuesdays to a new level (without the hassle) with this deconstructed version of classic fish tacos. Served over a bed of quinoa and drizzled with yogurt crema, these Baja Fish Taco Bowls let you switch up average taco nights by swapping out tortillas and shells for quick-cooking, protein-packed quinoa mixed with nutrient-dense kale. This easy, satisfying meal adds deliciously seasoned fish, creamy avocado and hearty whole grains to your diet with a lighter version of Baja sauce as a perfect companion for fish tacos.

At its core, this tasty weeknight meal relies on the ease and light, nutty flavor of Success Tri-Color Boil-in-Bag Quinoa, which is ready in just 10 minutes. It's packed with protein, all nine essential amino acids and is a good source of fiber, making it a perfect solution for busy moments whether your loved ones eat vegan, vegetarian or a mix of everything.

If a jam-packed calendar calls for a light dinner, or you're searching for a quick side to pair with your protein of choice, add a little color to the table with this Edamame Brown Rice and Lentil Salad. Brimming with tasty, colorful ingredients like bell peppers, cucumbers and more, it's a wholesome and satisfying way to recharge after a long day.

Take the guesswork out of cooking this flavorful salad with 100% whole grain Success Boil-in-Bag Brown Rice, offering high-quality, pre-cooked grains that's ready in just 10 minutes without measure or mess. It leaves you with a serving of fluffy, nutty brown rice that cooks up perfectly every time to take some stress out of family dinners.

Visit SuccessRice.com to find more recipe solutions for busy weeknights.

Edamame Brown Rice and Lentil Salad

Prep time: 10 minutes
Cook time: 10 minutes
Servings: 4

- 1 bag Success Brown Rice
- 1 cup cooked green or brown lentils
- 1 cup edamame, cooked, cooled and shelled
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- 1 cucumber, diced
- 1/4 cup red onion, finely chopped
- 1/4 cup fresh parsley, chopped
- 1/4 cup roasted almonds and sunflower seeds (optional)

- Dressing:**
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
 - 2 tablespoons lemon juice
 - 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
 - 1 clove garlic, minced
 - 1/8 teaspoon salt
 - 1/8 teaspoon black pepper

Prepare rice according to package directions.

In large mixing bowl, combine rice, lentils, edamame, bell pepper, cucumber, red onion and parsley. Toss gently to combine.

To make dressing: In separate small bowl, whisk olive oil, lemon juice, Dijon mustard, garlic, salt and pepper until well combined.

Toss salad with dressing until well combined. Sprinkle with roasted almonds and sunflower seeds, if desired.



Baja Fish Taco Bowls

Baja Fish Taco Bowls

Prep time: 10 minutes
Cook time: 10 minutes
Servings: 4

- 2 bags Success Tri-Color Quinoa
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 4 white-fleshed fish fillets (5-6 ounces each)
- 1 teaspoon Cajun seasoning
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 3/4 cup plain Greek yogurt
- 1 tablespoon lime zest
- 1 teaspoon lime juice
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cumin
- 4 cups packed baby kale
- 1 ripe avocado, halved, pitted, peeled and thinly sliced

Prepare quinoa according to package directions.

In large skillet over medium heat, heat oil. Season fish with Cajun seasoning and salt. Cook 2-3 minutes per side, or until fish is lightly browned and starts to flake. Set aside.

In small bowl, stir yogurt, lime zest, lime juice and cumin.

In medium bowl, toss quinoa with kale. Divide between four bowls. Top each with fish, sliced avocado and dollop of yogurt and lime crema.

Substitutions: Use taco seasoning or chili powder in place of Cajun seasoning. Use arugula or baby spinach instead of kale.



Edamame Brown Rice and Lentil Salad

YOUNG

Young Organizing Unionists for the Next Generation

The AFGE Young Organizing Unionists for the Next Generation program seeks to mobilize young union members to become leaders and activists for social change within AFGE and the Labor Movement.






AFGE members who are under the age of 40 and those mentors that are over 40 will work together to include younger workers into the union structure and keep them engaged in what's at stake for working class Americans.

AFGE YOUNG intends to provide young members with networking opportunities and resources

to engage in mobilizing other young workers into AFGE, union training to promote leadership skills, innovative social gatherings, AFGE conference meetings, and other engaging events. In doing so, AFGE YOUNG participants work to build lasting labor solidarity, advance issues of social and economic justice, and find more inclusive ways to engage the current and future generations in the Labor Movement.

For more information, or to get involved at the Local 987 level, contact Brandon Respress at brandon.respress@afgelocal987.org.

Your Union Insurance Benefits

-  **Life:** Permanent, Portable, Cash Value, Living Benefits. A Much Better Plan than FEGLI.
-  **Dental & Vision:** 3 Plans to choose from, dependent children covered to age 26, extended family is eligible for their own plan.
-  **Aflac Accident:** Pays over fifty Benefits for on or off-the-job accidents.
-  **Aflac Hospital Indemnity:** Pays Benefits for on and off-the-job accidents and sickness/surgery/maternity.
-  **Aflac Critical Illness:** Pays Benefits up to \$30,000 upon the occurrence of cancer, heart attack, stroke, and many other Critical Illnesses.

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Nick Wells
Cell: (478) 538-1652
Email: NWells@Benefitarchitects.com

