



One Voice, Union Strong

Local 1998 of the National Federation of Federal Employees, IAMAW, AFL-CIO

Representing the employees of Passport Services, a division of the Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs, since Oct. 19, 1981

A New Administration: A New Hope

By Secretary-Treasurer Jennifer Gile

With the coming of the new Presidential administration, NFFE Local 1998 is proud to welcome President Barack Obama's selection for Secretary of State, former First Lady and Senator Hillary Clinton. Secretary Clinton has an excellent history of supporting causes that concern working Americans. IAMAW's Machinists Non-Partisan Political League (MNPL), which tracks how our elected officials vote on key labor issues, states that during her two terms as a New York Senator, Clinton voted 94% of the time for our issues.

Demonstrating her understanding of the value of Union workers, she appeared at the 2008 IAMAW Convention to request support for the Obama/Biden

ticket, stating that "No one has more at stake in this election that the American labor movement." At the close of her speech, the IAMAW delegates, including our own President Colin Walle, voted unanimously to make Clinton an honorary member of the IAMAW.



Secretary of State Hillary Clinton receiving her honorary union membership from IAMAW President Tom Buffenbarger on Sept. 8, 2008.

Welcome, Sister Clinton!

NFFE Local 1998 is not only encouraged by Secretary Clinton's record but also by the Obama Transition Team's interest in meeting with Union leaders. On December 17, 2008 Ambassador Joe Huggins (retired), a member of the Transition Team for the Department of State, met with NFFE General Counsel Susan Grundmann and NFFE Local 1998 Union representatives (Colin Walle, Rob Arnold, Jennifer Gile, and Kamaria Blandford). During the meeting the Union brought up employee concerns about vulnerabilities in the passport issuance process, including Passport Specialist production quotas and the change in the CFR that allowed the use of contractors to perform the passport application acceptance/execution function.

Issue Highlights:

- Welcome Secretary of State Hillary Clinton
- Report on IAMAW & NFFE Conventions
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2008 NFFE and IAMAW Conventions

By Union President Colin Patrick Walle

NFFE Local 1998 sent delegates to two Union conventions held in the autumn of 2008. The International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW) held their convention in Orlando, Florida from September 8-12, 2008, while the National Federation of Federal Employees held their convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin from October 6-9, 2008.

Last year was the first time our local has sent anyone to the IAMAW convention and I was proud to attend and represent our members. The theme of the convention was the famous "Four Freedoms" speech by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. We heard speeches and presentations from his grandson, members of Congress, labor leaders, writers, and others.

The two big issues were the pending election and the financial state of the union. The IAMAW had endorsed then-Senator Hillary Clinton in the primaries, but as a newly acclaimed honorary

member of the IAMAW, it was Clinton who made the motion to endorse then-Senator Barack Obama in the general election. This was unanimously agreed to by the over 1,500 delegates. (continued on page 2)



Then-candidate Senator Barack Obama received a rousing greeting from IAMAW members when he addressed the convention on September 12, 2008.

IAMAW and NFFE conventions, continued from Page 1

At the IAMAW convention the delegates also addressed the difficult issue of the union's financial state and the need to raise the dues. The IAMAW's finances had been hit hard by 9/11 (which impacted air travel and airplane manufacturing workers represented by the union), by the state of the economy, and by anti-union policies under the previous administration. The IAMAW had cut staff and taken pay freezes, but more needed to be done. After a proposal to make dues 2% of salary was shot down, and after a proposal to raise dues by approximately \$3 per pay period was rejected, the delegates voted to approve an increase that equates to \$2.54 per pay period. This was an undesirable but necessary solution.

Our local sent two delegates to the NFFE convention - Chicago Passport Agency Union Steward Claude Scott and myself (in place of former Vice President Mike Garofano, who was promoted to an Operations Officer position at NPC). We heard from Congressman Danny Davis (D-IL) as well as IAMAW President Tom Buffenbarger. The delegates also tackled a number of revisions to the bylaws.

The delegates re-elected Rick Brown as President of NFFE, and Bill Dougan as Secretary-Treasurer. I was elected as a Vice President of NFFE along with Patty LaSala, Debbie Ransom, John Obst, Joe Drozdowski, Tim Ostrowski, and Debbie McGrath. Claude and I were excited to receive an organizing award on behalf of our Local 1998 representatives.

2008 Training Report

By Union Vice President Rob Arnold

With 18 offices and growing, Local 1998 is an unusually spread-out Union local, which can make training tough. President Walle compensates by emailing Stewards assigned reading and quizzes for self-study. Even so, communication among our reps is a challenge as we rarely get a chance to meet outside of email.

However, in 2008 a record number of reps got to meet at the IAMAW Wimpisinger Center in Maryland. Class space is often limited, but former-VP Mike Garofano was able to finagle multiple NFFE 1998 reps into the same classes. This was a great opportunity to meet, bond, swap war stories and brain storm. NFFE 1998 reps attended the Advanced Federal Employees course (*below*), the Federal Employees Collective Bargaining Program and the Federal Employees Program, among other courses. We are indebted to the amazing staff of the Wimpisinger Center and its Director, Chris Wagoner, for providing top-notch instruction and the coordination opportunities for our representatives.



Rob Arnold, Debra Reese-Jolly, Kamaria Blandford, and Colin Walle pose with passport plaque at the IAMAW's Wimpisinger Center in MD.



NFFE President Rick Brown with Local 1998 Union Steward Claude Scott at the October 2008 NFFE convention in Milwaukee, WI

CPC Second-Hand Smoke Resolved

By CPC Union Steward Boyd Hinton

In November 2008 a previously designated non-smoking area at the Charleston Passport Center (CPC) was designated a smoking area without notifying the Union of the change to working conditions. The new smoking area was located in a breezeway connecting CPC to a building containing the cafeteria, lunchroom and conference center. This change exposed employees to second-hand smoke when using breezeway to transit between buildings.

Many CPC employees expressed their dissatisfaction to the Union about the breezeway being designed a smoking area. Employee complaints even addressed cigarette smell saturating clothing and food. The CPC Union Representatives immediately contacted the CPC RD to convey the employees' concerns about their workplace safety and to find an alternative smoking area.

Some short term alternative routes between CPC and the other building were suggested by the CPC Management before a permanent solution was enacted about two weeks later. A gazebo was erected well out of range of non-smoker exposure, which is roofed and open aired with seating and includes cigarette butt disposal. The gazebo is on the lawn adjacent to the breezeway, which is accessible by a locked gate. The breezeway is again a designated non-smoking area.

FLRA investigating Unfair Labor

Practice charge re: change in elements

By Union President Colin Patrick Walle

All 1,400 bargaining unit employees are starting to receive their annual evaluations for the shortened 2008 appraisal period. The 1,300 Passport Specialists represented by Local 1998 had input into the elements and received an implementing memo explaining the changes - both negotiated by the Union. However, the 100 employees who work as Contact Representatives, File Assistants, Cashiers, and Processing Assistants did not have any input into their elements and did not receive the implementing memo, even though Local 1998 had sought to do the same for them.

That disparity is the crux of the Unfair Labor Practice charge (ULP) filed by the Union on behalf of employees who work in jobs other than the Passport Specialist positions. The Union filed the ULP on November 28, 2008 and it is being investigated by the FLRA's Washington, DC office.

Annual National Union-Management Cooperation Meeting held in DC

By Vice President Rob Arnold

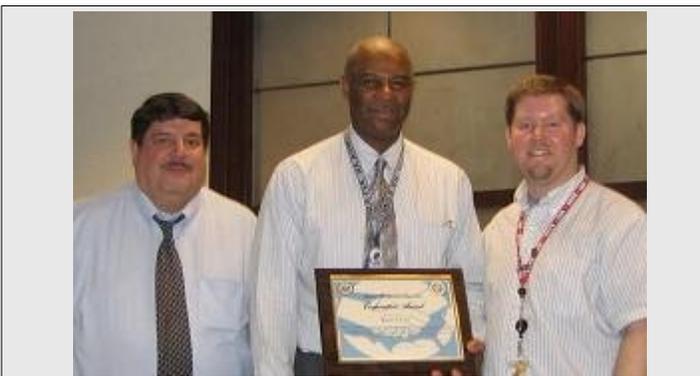
Each year, NFFE 1998 National officers and members of upper Passport Management meet to consult on the state of Passport Services. The 2008 National Union-Management Council meeting almost didn't happen during 2008, but it got worked in on 12/16/08 and the morning of 12/18/08. The Union typically makes numerous recommendations to improve the organization, and this meeting was no different.

President Colin Walle, Secretary-Treasurer Jennifer Gile, PPT/TO Senior Steward Kamaria Blandford and I made up the Union team. Gary Roach, Dorothy Flaak, Steve Rojas, Winnie Fuentes of Headquarters Field Operations and Chief Labor Management Negotiator Steve Polson attended as the Management representatives.

The meeting agenda included discussion of many issues, including the new Passport offices. The Union raised potential problems relating to recent PII directives and suspect birth attendant adjudication. The comparative value of original documents vs. photocopies was also discussed, with the Union recommending certified copies be required for issuance of a full validity passport. The Union also urged increased availability of compressed work schedules (CWS). Other concerns raised included the effect of the current workload on year-end evaluations, and President Walle's election as a Vice President for the National Federation of Federal Employees. The Union formally requested that ergonomics equipment (electric staplers and electric hole-punchers) be provided to all employees.

The major news coming out of the meeting was the upcoming closing of the Washington, Chicago, and Houston night shifts. Management announced that the government employees of these shifts would be absorbed into the day shifts without the need for layoffs (subsequently the Union received notification of the proposal to terminate the 4/10 compressed work schedule on the night shift in Chicago and Washington, and Union representatives are bargaining over those proposals).

Ken Cato, SIA Assistant Regional Director, was presented with the first ever Union-Management Cooperation Award. The award was unanimously awarded for his years of tireless effort as the PPT/FO Management liaison to the Union. Despite a sincere appreciation for his work, the group decided to trick Mr. Cato into appearing for an "urgent contract update." He arrived out of breath, unable to believe he had raced across town for a plaque and a two-minute photo op.



Senior Passport Operations Manager Gary Roach and Union President Colin Walle present Cooperation Award to SIA ARD Ken Cato (center)

Thank you Leah Anderson!

By Union President Colin Patrick Walle

Long-term Union member and Los Angeles Passport Agency Senior Passport Specialist Leah Anderson retired on January 2, 2009 after 35 years working for Passport Services. Leah served as a Union representative for nearly two decades, including four years as the Union President during the mid-nineties. Leah lead Local 1998 when negotiating the very first Partnership Agreement with Passport Services Management on April 6, 1995.



As the Senior Steward at the Los Angeles Passport Agency, Leah helped employees by protecting compressed work schedules from being suspended during the holidays and busy seasons, filing grievances over promotions, advocating for more fair duty officer and vacation schedules, and addressing safety/health concerns - among many other things.

When Bill Beardall was elected President and I was elected Secretary-Treasurer in 1998, Leah - aka "Mom" - proved invaluable in helping us learn the ropes and know about what had been going on in labor-management relations.

Thanks to Leah Anderson for all of her many contributions over the years to NFFE Local 1998, we will miss you!!!

Safety concerns at SE, SF & TO

By Secretary-Treasurer Jennifer Gile

Nationwide, there has been a lot of construction at the various offices to expand and modernize facilities. Unfortunately the construction has brought up some very big health concerns.

Contractors doing renovations at the San Francisco Passport Agency in late November found asbestos under the carpet. As a result, the office was closed for three days while the asbestos was properly removed and a third-party evaluated the space for safety. The Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) and the Domestic Environmental and Safety Division (DOS) were also involved.

In early November at the Seattle Passport Agency, there was a temporary pressed wood wall erected to separate the construction space from the counter and adjudication section. The wood was treated with formaldehyde and gave off fumes that made employees sick. The construction contractor agreed to seal the wall to eliminate the fumes, however this was not effective. The wall was replaced with safer material in mid-December shortly after OSHA contacted the Seattle Passport Agency with a complaint about the formaldehyde.

On the evening of 12/17 a construction crew at PPT/TO removed tiles using heat and the smell consequently made some employees sick. FO authorized Management to send home unwell employees. Also, employees in the DC area have felt shaking of the buildings while at work. Management informed the Union that the shaking was caused by blasting at a nearby construction site.

According to OSHA's website, their mission is to "prevent work-related injuries, illnesses, and death." For more information please visit www.OSHA.gov.

OSHA's toll-free number is **1-800-321-OSHA**.

Money and membership

By Secretary-Treasurer Jennifer Gile

Although many of our dues-paying members were promoted, retired or otherwise left the BUE over the course of 2008, it was still a very strong year for membership. A total of 145 SF-1187's were submitted to add new dues-paying members and we now have 360 members. In fact, we did so well last year that that NFFE Local 1998 was presented an Organizing Award at the 2008 NFFE Convention. Welcome new members and thank you to everyone who encouraged membership!



Due to the effects of September 11, 2001 on IAMAW airline workers & airplane manufacturers, airline deregulation and a troubled economy, the IAMAW convention delegates voted to increase membership dues. Consequently, the NFFE Local 1998 dues increased on January 1, 2009 from \$19.75 to \$22.29 per pay period. NFFE Local 1998 understands that many employees face economic hardship in these tough times. Benefits, such as scholarships and discounts on insurance, technology and travel are available only for dues-paying members. See the "Benefits Corner" for details.

Change is in the air....

Notice some changes to your newsletter? Good eye! There are two major differences that have come to us since the June 2008 issue.

First, the new NFFE National logo was debuted at the 2008 NFFE Convention. As you can see, our flashy new logo incorporates the old NFFE logo (use for the last 20 years) and the IAMAW logo, along with an eagle clutching a NFFE banner. The eagle design harkens all the way back to 1917.

Second, "NFFE 1998 News" is now named "One Voice, Union Strong." A contest was held this January to choose a new newsletter name. The winner, Union member Charles Nohavitzka (a Passport Specialist at the Houston Passport Agency), will receive a \$30 gift card to the business of his choice. Thank you to everyone who voted!



Old NFFE logo



New NFFE logo

Benefits Corner

By Secretary-Treasurer Jennifer Gile

There are many benefits available only to dues-paying members which can be viewed at <http://www.nffe1998.org/bylaws.htm>. Due to our affiliation with the AFL-CIO, members are also eligible for valuable Union Plus discounts and programs (www.unionplus.org).



Planning your summer getaway? NFFE Local 1998 dues-paying members get a savings of between 5% and 30% from Norwegian Cruise Lines! Visit the Union Plus website or call 1-866-867-0593 to get more information or book your vacation.



New Union member Iesha McBride with PPT/WN Senior Steward Melissa Toby at December 2008 Union luncheon

FLRA classes in Boston, Denver & DC

By NPC Senior Steward Helen Bechard

Stewards from Boston, NPC, Washington, and Colorado attended classes in Boston and Denver provided by the Federal Labor-Relations Authority (FLRA). The FLRA reviews Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) charges, Clarifications of Unit, exceptions to arbitrator's awards, determines negotiability of issue and resolves impasses during negotiations.

This class was designed to introduce the attendees to the FLRA, where it falls in the scheme of things, who runs it, its function and how this tool can be used by labor and management. It was excellent as an introductory class. The class administrators shared some cases (generically, of course) and we were given an opportunity to discuss these in a group setting. I encourage everyone to get into this class if possible, and in the meantime, visit www.FLRA.gov. Check it out!



NFFE Local 1998 Leadership

Nationwide Union Reps

President Colin Patrick Walle, **Vice President** Rob Arnold, **Secretary-Treasurer** Jennifer Gile, **Recording Secretary** (Vacant), **Chief Steward** Karen Proctor-Adams, **Trustee** Ronda Humphries (2 Vacant)

Local Senior Stewards

BN: Janis Galvin; **CPC:** Russell Gaither; **CG:** Eva Brumfield; **CO:** Corrina Davis; **CT:** (Vacant); **HH:** Ted Palmer; **HN:** Lisa Bohannon; **HQ:** Kamaria Blandford; **LA:** Isis Press; **MM:** Dale Chai; **NO:** Debra Reese-Jolly; **NY:** Two Feathers Neal; **PA:** Sharlene Dandridge; **NPC:** Helen Bechard; **SF:** Amha Gezahegn; **SE:** Sang Hwang; **SIA:** (Vacant); **WN:** Melissa Toby

Local Stewards

BN: (Vacant); **CPC:** Boyd Hinton, Brian Ollivierre & Kenneth Howard; **CG:** Claude Scott & Victoria Ehimwenman; **CO:** Deborah Hetrick; **CT:** (Vacant); **HH:** (Vacant); **HN:** Butrina Tolbert (2 Vacant); **HQ:** (Vacant); **LA:** Lynnette Frowner; **MM:** Elizabeth Mendoza & Ana Mercado; **NO:** Jeanette Triplett & Donald Roberts (1 Vacant); **NY:** Alejandro Rodriguez & Lydia Perez; **PA:** (2 Vacant); **NPC:** Brian Rigolizzo, Susan Lagle, Arthur Levant & Michelle Tardiff; **SF:** Scott Mullins; **SE:** Rachel Devlin & Barb Krell; **SIA:** (Vacant);

WN: Tatanesha Boggs, Tanika Jenkins & Josue Trinidad-Perez

For interest in filling a vacant position or if you are an employee at CT or SIA needing assistance, please contact the Union President.