



# Local 1998 News



Issue 14

National Federation of Federal Employees, IAMAW, AFL-CIO

June 2008

Representing the bargaining unit employees of Passport Services, a division of the Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs

## Issue Highlights:

- Work schedule settlement
- New adjudicator elements
- Union endorses HR 5752
- Record # of members
- Visits to PPT/NO, PPT/HH, PPT/CT, & PPT/CO
- PPT file search scandal
- Increase in # of BUE
- Mysterious substance
- 131 attend orientation
- Union finances
- Seating assignment deal

## NFFE Local 1998 Executive Board:

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Colin Patrick Walle

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Jennifer Gile - SE

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(Vacant) - SIA

Melissa Toby - WN

### Local 1998 Address

PO Box 2221

Seattle, WA 98111

### Website

www.nffe1998.org

## Night shift grievance settled, arbitration cancelled: settlement will have impact on employees nationwide

*By Union President Colin Patrick Walle*

Eight night shift employees at the Washington Passport Agency (PPT/WN) returned to the day shift on Tuesday, May 27th as the result of the amicable settlement of a grievance filed by NFFE Local 1998. In addition, one night shift employee who had been temporarily moved to the day shift due to medical reasons was authorized to stay on the day shift permanently. The settlement was signed on May 22nd by Passport Services Acting Managing Director Florence Fultz, Department of State Attorney Adviser David Huitema, Union Vice President Mike Garofano, and myself.

The grievance was originally filed on October 29, 2007 and alleged violations of Article 26 of the contract after Management forced new employees to move from the day shift to the night shift. The Union invoked arbitration on February 15th, and a hearing was scheduled for May. However, Union and Management officials were involved in intense and constructive settlement talks, so the hearing was first postponed and then cancelled after the dispute was resolved.

As part of the settlement, any night shift employee - anywhere in Passport Services, not just PPT/WN - who did not receive fair warning that the night shift was going to be a requirement has

until 8:00 PM local time on Friday, June 13th to notify his/her supervisor of the desire to move to day shift. Day shift employees who volunteered for the night shift (when the assumption was that they could return to day shift), and day shift employees forced to move to night shift who were only told prior to being hired that the night shift was a "possibility", are considered to not have been given "fair warning". Please read the settlement for full details.

Those employees will be moved to the day shift by August 12th, though possible construction delays at Chicago, NPC, and CPC may move that date back for those offices.

One important part of the settlement is that the parties reiterated that participation in the Article 26 Compressed, Flexitour, and Part-Time work schedules are completely "VOLUNTARY".

As part of the settlement, the parties agreed to add a new Article 38, "Second Shift & Night Shift", to address changes from night shift to day shift, and vice versa. The section on second/night shifts in Article 26 was deleted and moved to the new Article 38. Employees not covered by the settlement agreement that wish to change shifts must henceforth do so based on the provisions of the new article.

## New performance elements for Passport Specialists

*By Union President Colin Patrick Walle*

83% of all Department of State (DOS) staff were given the highest possible rating level - "Outstanding" - in 2006. Because the DOS Human Resources office felt that "meaningful distinctions" in performance levels were not being made, a new system was developed and proposed to the labor organizations representing DOS staff.

NFFE Local 1998 worked with Passport Services HQ Management on this project, after Management notified the Union of this change in working conditions and the Union invoked its right to bargain. Management agreed to a Union proposal to allow all employees 2 hours of official work time to watch an informative Town Hall-style video presentation and to participate in a survey conducted by the Union. The Union used that input to develop its position.

The Union requested information on the percentage of employees rated Outstanding in Passport Services, and was told that only 32% of Passport Specialists were rated Outstanding in 2006. The parties do not... *(continued on page 4)*

## Union endorses HR 5752

*By NFFE Local 1998 S/T Rob Arnold*

NFFE Local 1998 has taken the unusual step of endorsing legislation that would mandate that the U.S. passport be produced domestically. This endorsement comes on the heels of a series of embarrassing stories in the media about the Government Printing Office's decision to outsource creation of the most high tech pieces used in the current e-passport.

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## Local 1998 Recording Secretary & NFFE BR visit Mile High city

By PPT/CO Senior Steward Corrina Davis

We were extremely pleased to have both Local 1998 Recording Secretary Jennifer Gile and NFFE Business representative Gary Johanson visit our agency on April 24, 2008. It was not only an eye awakening experience, but also allowed for 31% of the staff to become official Union members! Due to this visit we have a new Senior Steward - me - and a new Union Steward, Deborah Hetrick. We have already initiated our first UMC meeting which was enlightening experience for all parties involved.

## Record number of Union members

By NFFE Local 1998 Recording Secretary Jennifer Gile

A priority for this spring was to conduct lunch & learn sessions about Union membership benefits. We have recruited over 60 new members since January, many of whom are new employees, and we are now up to almost 300 total NFFE Local 1998 Union Members. This is a membership rate of about 21%, which is much higher than the average membership in federal unions! National Reps conducted lunch & learn membership drives at the New Orleans, Connecticut, Colorado and Honolulu Passport Agencies. San Francisco Senior Steward Amha Gezahegn also held a membership drive at his Agency and recruited five new members! Since the publication of our March newsletter, over 40 new employees nationwide have joined. Welcome new members! Thank you for your support!

## “Mahalo” Honolulu Passport Agency

By NFFE Local 1998 Recording Secretary Jennifer Gile

On May 14, 2008, I was able to visit the Honolulu Passport Agency and conduct two Union Orientation sessions for 12 of the 13 employees, most of whom are new to Passport Services within the last year. There were many questions and the employees were very happy to have a National Union representative visit for the first time. Prior to the visit, Honolulu had no Union members; as a result of the lunch & learn membership drive, Honolulu's membership went from 0 to 8 Union members. At least 2 of the new members are interested in stepping up to be new Stewards and they will hold an election soon!



NFFE Local 1998 Recording Secretary Jennifer Gile at a lunch-n-learn session with Colorado Passport Agency employees on April 24, 2008.

## Union orientation & salad pizza at the Connecticut Passport Agency

By NFFE Local 1998 Vice President Mike Garofano

I was fortunate to be able to visit the Connecticut Passport Agency on Wednesday, May 7<sup>th</sup> and Thursday, May 8<sup>th</sup>. Wednesday was mainly centered around representational training for PPT/CT's new Senior Steward Mayla Tillackdharry. Mayla was very quick to pick up on her new duties, and eager to promote the Union in her office. I know we all look forward to working with her more in the near future. I also had an opportunity to speak with Agency Director Jamiss Sebert. We discussed local issues such as space, staffing, counter traffic and the workload.

Thursday was very busy starting with a Union Orientation for about fourteen government employees. The session ran a little long, but that was partly my fault and partly due to some excellent questions from the employees. Next, Mayla and I were able to meet with ARD Steve Christian. This was very helpful since we covered items such as a Union office, improvements for the Union file cabinet and applying for official time for Mayla as she continues to use the Union's self-study guide.

The Thursday lunch period was very festive as we dined on fare from Norwalk's Famous Pizza and their legendary "Salad Pizza." I greatly appreciated the hospitality of all of the employees of the Connecticut office and I look forward to another visit.

## New Orleans Passport Agency welcomes visitors & new members

By PPT/NO Union Steward Jeanette Triplett

On March 28, 2008, Local Union representatives Debra Reese-Jolly, Donald Roberts, Yvonne Smith, and Jeanette Triplett conducted a membership drive for the New Orleans Passport Agency. During this time, our NFFE Local 1998 Vice President, Mike Garofano and our NFFE Business Representative, Gary Johanson joined in with us to make this a momentous occasion. The local reps were able to sit down with Gary and Mike for training. We had an opportunity to see on hand how the new PowerPoint Union Orientation is presented to the new employees. Mike and Gary had the opportunity to meet with upper management. The Union membership drive here in New Orleans was a huge success. We would like to give a huge welcome to ten employees who took this opportunity to become Union members..... **Welcome.**



Pictured from L to R: NFFE Local 1998 Senior Steward Debra Reese-Jolly, NFFE Business Representative Gary Johanson, and NFFE Local 1998 Union Steward Donald Roberts at PPT/NO on March 28, 2008

## Passport File Search Scandal

By Union President Colin Patrick Walle

By now, everyone has heard the news about a few individuals snooping at the passport files of Senator Obama, Senator McCain, and Senator Clinton. In response, the Office of Inspector General has begun an investigation and Passport Services notified the Union of a proposed new PIERS auditing policy.

After one employee was initially told that she could not have a Union representative accompany her to an OIG interview, the Union interceded and obtained concurrence from HQ that the Weingarten Rights do apply. The employee was allowed to have the Union rep attend. The Union sent a reminder to all employees nationwide of their rights. Another employee was interviewed by the OIG outside of her normal work hours. The Union contacted HQ and was able to ensure that she received 6 hours of overtime payment for the interview and preparation.

Bargaining over the new auditing policy continues, with the Union's counter-proposal submitted on June 2nd.

## Boom in # of Passport Employees

By NFFE Local 1998 Recording Secretary Jennifer Gile

This year has seen a tremendous amount of growth in the number of Passport Services employees. From the beginning of 2008, our Bargaining Unit has increased from about 1,100 employees to over 1,400. In March 2007, we had 665 adjudicators; now we have 1259.

This spring, Union Stewards have been working to make sure that every employee who has not had a New Employee Union Orientation, no matter how long he or she has worked at Passport Services, receives an Orientation to their rights and what their Union does for its Bargaining Unit Employees (BUE). The Nationwide Reps have made it a priority to standardize the New Employee Union Orientation, which now includes a PowerPoint presentation, so that the local Stewards have a tool to help them communicate efficiently to new BUE's. We see the Orientation as one of our most important responsibilities because an employee who knows about his or her rights is an employee who knows when those rights have been violated.

## Union finances: Rob's report

By NFFE Local 1998 Secretary-Treasurer Rob Arnold

Things are developing well financially for 2008. So far, our expenses on membership drives/trips have been running higher than projected, but we've been getting better than predicted results also, so the additional members will probably make up for the higher bills.

The Washington Passport Agency's night shift issue seemed headed for arbitration (and thousands of dollars in expenses, were the Union to arbitrate and lose), but an agreement was worked out that helped **all** night shift workers within Passport Services and cost us nothing (see related story).

The main financial development since our last newsletter was some unexpected good news. Several years ago, an accounting error occurred in the complicated method involving how dollars go from the Department of State, to NFFE national, to our local. Correcting that error will result in an extra \$4000 for our local, one that we had not anticipated at the beginning of the year when we made up the 2008 budget. The increase makes us better able to take issues to arbitration and conduct more training/membership drives than we'd originally planned.

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## 131 attend Union Orientation at National Passport Center in 1 day

By PPT/NPC Senior Steward Helen Bechard

Earlier this year an attempt was made to hold Orientations for all the newly hired personnel here at NPC. When Management officials would not leave the room, the Orientations were cancelled and negotiations were entered to resolve this issue. In a precedence-setting move, on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008, Union and Management at the NPC signed a standard operating procedure regarding Union Orientations, including a statement that Management can only attend if invited. On May 13<sup>th</sup>, five Union Orientations were conducted for 131 new government employees.



Opening slide from the new Union Orientation PowerPoint presentation.

## CPC mysterious substance update

By PPT/CPC Union Steward Deborah Posey

As reported in the March 2008 newsletter, the Charleston Passport Center (CPC) was evacuated on the afternoon of Wednesday, March 4<sup>th</sup> and remained closed until Thursday afternoon, March 5<sup>th</sup>, when a mysterious substance was opened in the Mail Room of the building. By Thursday afternoon, the substance was determined to be non-hazardous. Management attempted to contact all Night Shift employees by telephone to advise them to report for work on Thursday evening. The message some employees received contained conflicting information, some employees weren't contacted at all, some employees didn't receive the message until well into the evening, and others had already made other plans for the evening when they weren't contacted prior to the beginning of their shift.

Night Shift employees who did not report to work were charged with annual leave or leave without pay. Union Representatives filed a Formal Grievance to request Night Shift bargaining unit employees be reimbursed for the annual leave/leave without pay they were charged for that evening. We are awaiting a response from PPT/FO/FC.

On a more positive note, in late May, CPC Management conducted its first-ever emergency contact telephone drill of all Center bargaining unit employees. This phone drill can help prepare us for possible future events that are similar to the one that occurred in March and will help us respond in the event of other emergencies, such as hurricanes. Union efforts in helping to identify the past mistakes have directly influenced the decision to hold this drill for the first time in CPC's existence.

## New Passport Specialist job elements

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... expect that difference to continue under the new system.

The Union and Management worked collaboratively and amicably on determining where the previous DS-1966 job element wording would be placed within the new DS-7644 format, and also negotiated an implementing joint memo that was released on May 23, 2008.

One significant impact is that there is no longer an Outstanding rating level for each particular element/commitment. Under the old DS-1966, an employee could be rated Unacceptable, Fully Successful, Excellent, or Outstanding for each element. Now, with the new DS-7644, an employee can be rated Not Successful, Fully Successful, or Exceeds Expectations for each element. There was not a meaningful distinction between the Excellent and Outstanding ratings. The joint memo emphasizes that "Exceeds Expectations" takes the place of Excellent AND Outstanding. That is, if you were performing a duty at the Excellent level or at the Outstanding level in the past, you would be rated "Exceeds Expectations" under the new system.

This has a very positive impact on Passport Specialists, because the Outstanding production level no longer exists. Numerous surveys, input, and a petition showed that employees felt that the Fully Successful numerical standards (24 per hour, or 2 minutes and 30 seconds per application, for GS-9/11's) did not provide enough time for diligent adjudication. Even worse, in order to achieve the Outstanding rating under the old system, GS-9/11 adjudicators had to average 32 applications per hour (a paltry 1 minute and 53 seconds per application). With this change, employees who aim for the highest rating level in that element must now average 28 applications per hour (2 minutes and 9 seconds per application). For those employees, that is an additional 16 second per application that they can use to scrutinize the application and evidence for fraud indicators, and to make fewer errors. As the integrity of the passport issuance process (including the quotas) is the # 1 concern of the employees, this is a welcome change.



Employees had also repeated told the Union that they felt "quality" was not given enough emphasis on the job compared to "quantity". The new system should help to partially rectify that imbalance. The data error rate is now part of a separate job element, and not subsumed beneath the production requirements. The job description and "alignment to strategic goals" make it clear that our job is to issue passports to the right people, not to just move the work as quickly as possible. The anti-fraud element now makes it clear that "questionable cases" should be referred. The first job element on the DS-7644 has increased importance as all three work commitments have weight similar to the individual elements in the old system, and those three commitments all involve passport integrity and quality duties. The production - "quantity" - duties had been 1/4 of the critical elements in the old DS-1966, but now make up 1/7 of the critical elements/commitments in the new DS-7644. These examples demonstrate that under the new system there is increased emphasis on quality.

## Passports should be made in the U.S.

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The *Washington Times* called this a "disastrous, almost incomprehensible failure" in passport security, noting that "[t]he assembler and patent-holder, Netherlands-based Smartrac Technology Ltd., 'divulged in...October 2007...that China had stolen its patented chip technology for e-passport chips'."

NFFE Local 1998 agrees that the decision to outsource the production of passport covers and chips to foreign countries threatens our national security. Our members and our Union have nothing to gain in work or wages by this endorsement, since the books were not manufactured in Passport Services to begin with. But when our product is vulnerable to being counterfeited or its electronic information accessed, that undermines the efforts that we all make in issuing the premier citizenship and identity document.



The new bill, H.R. 5752, was introduced by Congressman Bill Sali and has 22 cosponsors. It has been referred to the House Foreign Affairs Committee. NFFE Local 1998 calls on Congress to pass H.R. 5752 or similar legislation that would prohibit the manufacture of blank United States passports or their components outside of the U.S. We urge all bargaining unit employees, and our supporters, to write, email, or call their Congressional representatives to support this important bill. There is, after all, a reason the document is called a "U.S. Passport".

**For more information on how to contact Congress to support H.R. 5752, go to the Local 1998 website and look under "Hot Topics":**

<http://nffe1998.org/>

**Or, enter this url into your web browser:**

<http://www.nffe1998.org/HR5752.htm>

## Seating Assignment Deal Reached

By PPT/SE Union Steward Barb Krell

The Seattle Union representatives secured a major achievement with a locally signed seating agreement with management in the Seattle Passport Agency. Seattle's Senior Steward Jennifer Gile and Regional Director Teresa Bobotek signed the agreement on May 29th after the Union/Management Council meeting ended.

This agreement was bargained over several months, with the Union strongly opposing the assignment of desk seating (after polling the employees). Management was adamant about assigning teams with supervisors, but the Union did not agree. In the final agreement, employees will be able to sit on either floor (the 9<sup>th</sup> or 33<sup>rd</sup>) based on passport seniority. Provisions are also included for employees with special needs.