

This afternoon, NTEU provided comments at the conclusion of the Commission All Staff Meeting. It was a very informative meeting and some of the questions that employees asked the Commission to ask, got to the heart of a couple of the comments President Sheryl Burrows provided on behalf of NTEU, included below:

Good afternoon. I am pleased to provide remarks on behalf of NTEU Chapter 208, the exclusive representative of NRC bargaining unit employees.

NTEU has been busy since our last Agency All Staff meeting. In July of 2016, Chapter 208 had our election and I am joined here by many dedicated members of the recently elected Executive Board, as well as stewards and members of various working groups. I am grateful for the work they do every day to support our Chapter.

Clergyman Phillips Brooks said, "Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers; pray for powers equal to your tasks." We all know that our agency and you, our bargaining unit employees, are facing and will continue to face many challenges in the next few years.

NTEU continues to focus on the important role that partnership plays in everything from the impact of building renovations and moves, changing security requirements including random searches and reevaluation of Security Clearance and drug testing requirements, and the significant activities associated with Project Aim, including re-baselining and prioritization, Corporate Support, Centers of Expertise, the Merger of NRR and NRO, and the COR standardization process. This is a relationship that both NTEU and the agency are committed to. And it means that we need to hear from our bargaining unit to ensure we bring your concerns to the partnership table.

Recognizing that our most important role is to advocate for our bargaining unit employees, NTEU believes training is very important. I am pleased to report that almost all of our stewards and officers attended annual training in March in order to be more effective in this role. Additionally, the Chapter assisted NTEU National as it arbitrated and won retroactive Transit Subsidy reimbursement for both fiscal years 2014 and 2015.

To enhance communication, we completely revised and updated our web page and continue to provide information you can use in our weekly Monday Minute.

NTEU hopes to have "powers equal to our tasks" and appreciates your support.

A large number of the 19 discreet activities associated with Project Aim have either been completed or, having received Commission approval, are being implemented. Some are still with the Commission. There is no question that the agency has accomplished a lot of very difficult work in a very short time in order to address both external and internal pressures.

Nonetheless, NTEU stewards and labor partners report hearing about the unintended consequences of Project Aim. For example, some employees, especially newer ones, have commented that they would be slower to consider raising safety concerns should they arise because they would not want management to focus on them in an environment where they fear their job may ultimately be on the line.

NTEU believes that there are primarily two challenges associated with the continuing implementation of Project AIM: first, the continuing erosion of trust in our agency's senior

leaders and management which is driven by the second challenge, the effectiveness of communications.

For some employees, the various communications addressing change equate to nothing more than benign “white noise” which exists in their background as they continue to engage in their work. For other employees, however, these communications are deeply demoralizing and contribute to the aforementioned erosion in trust.

NTEU understands the agency’s challenges. Effective communication is very difficult. It is important during “stable” times, but especially critical during periods when employees are experiencing so many quickly implemented changes to their working environment. This is when the trust issue really comes into play-- when the employees who are listening, who are looking to senior leadership and their managers for a clear message, do not see a correlation between the messages they are receiving and the actions that are being taken.

It is important that employees understand that all agency initiatives, decisions, and activities are not driven by Project Aim. But, sadly, NTEU is seeing Project Aim regularly used as an “excuse” for agency decisions. As if somehow putting the words “Project AIM” out there grants managers amnesty to make these decisions. For example, an employee determined to have been working at a higher grade level consistently over a few years, a true asset to the agency, was told that rather than being advanced to the higher grade, management would, instead, take away the higher graded work. One of the reasons cited for the decision was Project Aim.

Perhaps one of the most egregious unintended consequences of Project Aim may be management telling employees who are not getting enough substantive and challenging work that they should not seek work outside of their division because it will look like the division has too many FTE. Additionally, one labor partner recently told NTEU that the nickname for Project Aim in their office is Project RIF because they know they are not getting the truth from senior leaders. Being told that there will be large reductions but not to worry, causes some employees to worry more.

The agency says that our employees are our most important resource. Yet, with all the activities and metrics that have been met that are associated with Project Aim, with all the efforts to communicate, why is Project Aim still so profoundly confusing to many employees? And where is the important focus on the human face of this initiative?

At a recent two hour Town Hall meeting in which dozens of ideas for restructuring NRR were discussed, a lone voice from one of the staff attending the meeting asked about what this means to NRR employees’ quality of life. His questions were sincere and probing. For example, how does management intend to address the fear that the resulting uncertainty of restructuring the office will create? How will qualifications be addressed? Who will do appraisals, what commitment will management make to ensure that input to this process is appropriate and fair? When employees move to another Division, will alternate work schedules be protected? Will telework plans be protected? Will part-time employees have to change their schedules? How will the quality of their working environment and work/life balance be impacted?

These are not just “soft” questions; they are incredibly important questions. Questions whose answers affect employees working conditions every day. Especially when roles and responsibilities are not still not clear, processes and procedures are still not in place, and

resources including training are still not obvious or accessible. The “cultural differences” between offices and even between Headquarters and the Regions, further complicates the problem.

NTEU is not asking our senior leaders and managers to dwell on the agency’s challenges to the point that it destroys our employees’ faith in the positive possibilities that a more effective, efficient, and agile agency can offer; but NTEU wants to stress that employees who experience unpopular changes that accompany the activities associated with Project Aim, will view these changes as solid evidence that the agency lacks commitment to its employees. Couple this with the examples of unintended consequences I noted earlier and you have a larger challenge which must be acknowledged and addressed.

The “soft” questions are really the hard questions. NTEU is fully committed to working with our senior leaders and managers through partnership to ensure that these questions are acknowledged and addressed. NTEU’s focus will always be on the human face of change and the impact that change can and does have on our employees. NTEU believes that the agency’s recent change management initiative is an important step in the right direction and we applaud it.

In conclusion, both NTEU’s mission statement which emphasizes the importance of treating all federal employees with dignity and respect as well as our NRC values of integrity, service, openness, commitment, cooperation, excellence, and respect, support this focus. NTEU believes this focus will create an even more engaged workforce as the agency accomplishes its important safety mission now, in 2020, and into the future, and we hope “to have powers equal to our tasks.”

Thank you.

In Case You Missed It: Your support is being sought to help OCHCO better understand how the changes we are dealing with as an agency are impacting staff and management at all levels. In order to do so, OCHO is conducting a series of “Listening Sessions” at HQ and all four regions. The purpose of these listening sessions is for OCHCO’s organizational staff to listen to the perspectives of agency staff, supervisors, and SES regarding topics related to change. The information gathered will be used primarily to ensure change management tools and resources currently in development by OCHCO hit the mark.

Sessions at HQ will be held tomorrow, September 13 from 10-11:30 am in 3WFN 02-A18 and September 22 from 1-2:30 pm in 3WFN 02-A18. Please contact Lance Rakovan at (301) 415-2589 or Patrice Reid at (301) 287-0580 to get additional information and to register for one of these sessions. Thank you.

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