

NTEU Monday Minute for the Week of June 19, 2017: NTEU's Comments at the Semi-Annual Commission EEO Briefing – Leadership Is Doing the Right Thing

Good afternoon, Chairman Svinicki, Commissioners, EDO McCree, NRC leadership and managers, and my fellow bargaining unit employees. My comments on behalf of NTEU this afternoon, will be brief.

Peter Drucker, the famous writer and management guru, said: “Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.” This statement is especially relevant to the NRC now. In the era when the NRC was the No. 1 place to work in the federal government, when prioritizing work was not critical because the agency could move employees across business lines and keep those employees in unfunded positions indefinitely, the agency managed nicely. However, now the NRC, like most federal agencies, is facing a rapidly changing landscape. Our NRC values and Principles of Good Regulation are being tested. While our pro-active initiative, Project Aim, has positioned the NRC better than many agencies, unfortunately, our employees are now feeling the repercussion of many of the decisions that were made during, most recently, for example, the implementation of the Transforming Assets into Business Solutions or TABS initiative.

During that period, not so very long ago, many employees were moved from their duties in the technical offices to their current unfunded positions in corporate support offices. There was little or no effort to provide additional training and rotational opportunities so that these specific employees would be well-positioned to take on different responsibilities as the agency began its “right sizing” efforts under Project Aim. In fact, in question and answer sessions prior to implementation of TABS, affected employees were told that their move might have a detrimental impact on their ability to grow their career at the NRC since they were being reassigned to positions with little growth potential. Today, many of these same employees are facing the very real possibility of being included in a Reduction in Force or RIF.

At various meetings that NTEU attended while TABS was being implemented, NTEU commented that the employees being moved from the technical offices to corporate support were disproportionately from minority populations in the agency -- specifically women, women of color, and older employees. This may have been, in part, because of the demographics of the affected offices but the agency did not appear to take this concern seriously. Perhaps that is because many of the affected employees were either willing to be reassigned or simply didn't see any choice short of leaving the agency (which is really no choice at all). Thus, with a plausible explanation, this issue could be overlooked. Regardless, these employees were true team players and supported the agency's mission by moving to corporate support. As the agency faces the very real potential for a RIF, this fact should carry as much -- if not more -- weight in the decisions that are made to “right size” the agency. In NTEU's opinion, while that might not be the most efficient thing to do, it would be the right thing to do.

The question that NTEU implores our leaders to ask themselves today is whether the decisions that you are making regarding the number of FTE, including a determination that the agency

may need to RIF some employees in corporate support is the RIGHT THING TO DO or simply the most pragmatic thing to do!

This question is particularly relevant to bring up in this forum because a RIF may well affect a disproportionate number of employees that belong to protected classes under EEO law and regulations. Our agency has been making concerted efforts to ensure that our employees at all levels of the organization embrace all that diversity and inclusion have to offer us. When last year's SES class did not reflect this, our leadership wanted to know why. Diversity and inclusion have to exist at all levels of the agency! This is why our leadership needs to ask NOW about how unfunded positions in the corporate support offices will be addressed. In the event of a RIF, although Article 49.5 provides NTEU with the opportunity to submit ideas about ways to minimize the potential EEO impact of a proposed RIF, that opportunity will be available – as the old adage goes – a day late and a dollar short.

NTEU is concerned about the possibility that this will be the case. Some of the potentially impacted employees are part of the bargaining unit and NTEU can help them to speak in a unified voice. However, many of these employees are not allowed to be in the bargaining unit, and the only voice they will have is their own. This should greatly concern the agency. We should be better than that.

For years, the corporate support side of the agency has pointed out they feel less engaged than their technical counterparts. Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey and the Inspector General's Safety Culture and Climate Survey results support this assertion. And now this reality has even more troubling potential consequences.

NTEU has been meeting regularly with the agency in an Article 49 working group to explore as many possibilities as we can to avoid a RIF, but the agency must be willing to think outside the box, making every conceivable opportunity viable and available.

NTEU wants to be clear. We are aware that the NRC has a budget and must determine the most appropriate and effective way to use those resources. And NTEU recognizes that the agency is losing work and therefore, will not backfill unfunded positions. And NTEU applauds the voluntary steps that our leadership has taken thus far to align FTE and workload. In fact, NTEU would say that for the most part, the agency is almost there, FTE-wise. This also begs the question of whether the agency has now reached the point of diminishing returns. This makes the potential RIF currently under discussion even more troubling.

The proposed federal budget for 2018 suggests additional reductions and in April, OMB issued a memorandum requiring agencies to develop plans to reduce their workforces. Because the NRC has done this already in a fairly robust way through Project Aim and will make that assertion in its response to OMB, the agency should put a halt on any further discussion of a RIF, instead making the decision now to find alternative ways to use the many talents of the employees that would be subject to a RIF until attrition or additional buy outs/early outs, reduce agency FTE further.

The agency is experiencing extreme times, the agency must consider extreme measures such as job sharing to voluntarily reduce numbers while attrition gets the agency where it needs to be. Phased retirement is another option that doesn't seem to be getting the attention it deserves. Training is an important feature. Do we have employees in funded positions in the technical areas that can move into other funded positions, making way for those employees in corporate support with the appropriate skills to move into the vacated position?

At this time, agency management may be doing things right to quickly get to the "right number of employees with the right skills in the right positions" but NTEU asks our leadership to be accountable and consider the decisions that could have been made earlier that would have avoided the possibility of a RIF, rather than just considering those decision as "water under the bridge."

NTEU asks our NRC leadership, particularly at a time when the Agency Action Plan developed in response to last year's Federal Employee Viewpoint and Safety Culture and Climate Survey results has tasked staff with developing actionable items to strengthen our employees' willingness to trust our leaders, to be accountable for future as well as past decisions. Accountability is so much a part of any efforts to really strengthen trust.

This is exactly the time to not only do things right, but that you, our leaders, as you "walk the talk" of our NRC values, do the right thing.

Thank you.

In Case You Missed It: The Advisory Committee for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Employees (ACLGBT) cordially invites you to celebrate LGBT Pride Month by attending its annual luncheon on Thursday, June 29, 2017, from 12 noon – 1:00 p.m., in the TWFN auditorium. The theme for this year's celebration is "PRIDE and Prejudices: Modeling Inclusive Behavior." The keynote speaker will be Kevin Nunley, Chapter President and Chairman for the Board of Directors of Metro DC PFLAG (Parents, Family, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays in the Washington Metropolitan Area).

A boxed lunch from Modern Market is available for \$12.00 per person, or you may bring your own lunch. Lunches include a sandwich or salad; apple, chips, or baguette; and a drink. ACLGBT members will provide an assortment of desserts for all attendees to enjoy. Please RSVP by June 26, 2017, even if you plan to bring your own lunch.

Please provide payment (cash or check payable to Chon Davis) to any of the following individuals by Monday, June 26, 2017: OWFN: Candace Spore, 301-415-8537, O-10 E07; OWFN: Milton Valentin-Olmeda, 301-415-2864, O-13 E24; TWFN: Chon Davis, 301-415-6610, T-10 B38; TWFN: Damaris Marcano, 301-145-7328, T-4 C3; 3WFN: Melissa Ralph, 301-287-3678, 3WFN 08-A42. This event will be accessible by VTC in all regional offices and the Technical Training Center. Regional and TTC employees should check their Web site for VTC locations. If you need special accommodations please contact Melissa Ralph by e-mail at Melissa.Ralph@nrc.gov, or by phone at 301-287-3678.

Someone Said: "A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for." --John Shedd, writer