



National Federation of Federal Employees



Affiliated with the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers

Forest Service Council

We work for America every day

Ron Thatcher, President

Melissa Baumann, Secretary-Treasurer

Master Agreement Negotiations Update

April 9, 2009

Preparation for Master Agreement Negotiations Swings into High Gear

The current Master Agreement (MA) between the Forest Service and the NFFE Forest Service Council expires on June 2, 2010. Management has indicated that they wish to re-negotiate a large number of articles. Defending and seeking to improve the gains that we've made over the years through negotiations is the most fundamentally important work that your Council does. Many rights that employees take for granted are based on the MA. Many more rights have real meaning because the MA provides a mechanism for enforcement. Our MA is the foundation upon which everything our union does is built.

It is, therefore, with a great sense of responsibility that your NFFE Master Agreement Negotiations Team held a training and research session on March 21-27, 2009, to begin preparing in earnest for the upcoming negotiations.

I co-chair the team along with Steve Flory, NFFE Business Representative. Other team members include Betsy Evans, Chris Feutrier, Melissa Baumann, Dave Stamey, Lonnie Lewis, Eric Plimmer, Mark Davis, and Karen Mora. We have assembled a strong team, and I am proud to serve with them.



We arrived at the Winpisinger Center, IAM's world-class training facility, on Saturday, March 21 and worked virtually non-stop until leaving on Friday. Days began at 8:30 a.m. and ended at 8:30 p.m. Winpisinger staff provided presentations, access to resources, and exercises that directly assisted the Team. The Team performed a line-by-line review of the input received from members regarding what's working and what's not with the current MA. We brainstormed interests and potential options to address problems with existing articles and some potential new articles. We assigned each article to 2-3 team members for research and development.



The week was exhausting, but we left with the deep satisfaction that comes from working hard to prepare for an important challenge. As a team, we learned to listen, trust, and respect each other – another aspect of the week that cannot be underestimated. We feel good about our preparation.

We discussed and agreed about the importance of communicating with members during the negotiation process. Employees have a legitimate need to know about how their union is representing them in negotiations. On the other hand, we are using an interest-based process in which brainstorming ideas is part of the process. We must be professional in our communications so as not to inhibit the free and frank exchange of ideas in the negotiations room. This does not translate into a wall of silence, however. We shall strive to balance transparency and accountability with discretion and professionalism in our communications, so that members are as informed as possible.



The NFFE and Management Negotiations Teams will meet in Denver, April 20-24, 2009, to review the interest-based bargaining process, negotiate ground rules, and potentially assign union-management sub-teams to do pre-work on specific articles and/or issues. The first negotiation session is scheduled for July 26-August 8, 2009.

Stay tuned for updates as we work our way through the negotiations process.

In Solidarity,

/s/ Ron Thatcher

Ron Thatcher, President
NFFE Forest Service Council