

United DoD Workers Coalition

Nat'l Assn. of Aeronautical
Examiners
Nat'l Air Traffic Controllers Assn.
Professional Airways Systems
Specialists
Antilles Consolidated Education
Assn.
Int'l Brotherhood of Boilermakers
Assn. of Civilian Technicians
Communications Workers of
America
Federal Education Assn./NEA
Int'l Brotherhood of Electrical
Workers
Nat'l Federation of Federal
Employees
Fairchild Federal Employees Union
American Federation of Gov.
Employees
Nat'l Assn. of Gov. Employees
Int'l Guard Union of America
Int'l Assn. of Fire Fighters
Hawaii Council of Defense
Commissary Unions
Laborers' Int'l Union of
North America
Int'l Assn. of Machinists and
Aerospace Workers
Nat'l Marine Engineers Beneficial
Assn.
Int'l Organization of Masters,
Mates & Pilots
Metal Trades Dept., AFL-CIO
American Nurses Assn.
United American Nurses
Int'l Union of Operating Engineers
Int'l Union of Painters and Allied
Trades
United Assn. of Journeymen and
Apprentices of the Plumbing &
Pipe Fitting Industry of the U.S.
and Canada
United Power Trades Org.
Int'l Federation of Professional and
Technical Engineers
Retail, Wholesale, and
Department Store Union
Seafarers Int'l Union
Service Employees Int'l Union
Sport Air Traffic Controllers
American Federation of State,
County and Municipal Employees
American Federation of Teachers
Int'l Brotherhood of Teamsters
Int'l Assn. of Tool Craftsman

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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United DoD Workers Coalition (UDWC) Responds to Bush Administration Stonewalling on NSPS Deputy Defense Sec. Wolfowitz, OPM Director James Respond to Kennedy Inquiry

WASHINGTON, DC – On December 3rd, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz and Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Director Kay Coles James issued a letter regarding the current creation of the National Security Personnel System (NSPS). The letter was sent to Senator Edward Kennedy (D, MA), in response to his November 19th letter to Secretary Rumsfeld expressing concern over DoD's failure to properly include workers representatives in the creation of the new policy.

The below statement, drafted on behalf of the United DoD Workers Coalition (UDWC) by NAGE Legislative Director Steve Lenkart, is the UDWC response to the Wolfowitz/James December 3rd letter:

The coalition strongly disagrees with several statements as written in a letter released by Pentagon officials to Senator Edward M. Kennedy, dated December 3, 2004.

First page, fourth paragraph, the Pentagon writes, "(we) have offered to continue meeting (with the unions) throughout our regulation-writing period. We also hosted over 50 town hall meetings and 101 focus group sessions with employees all over the world. All of this was conducted prior (emphasis added) to beginning the effort to draft regulations to ensure we considered a broad range of perspectives and experiences."

I.) Pentagon officials did not offer to continue meeting with union officials throughout the regulation-writing process, however they eventually agreed to continue meeting after the unions strongly and repeatedly requested that lines of communication remain open during the writing process. The fear that lines of communication may be closed to employee-representative groups originated from the Pentagon's timeline plan to initiate NSPS, which included a "Dark Period", that was scheduled to begin in September of 2004.

It was decided by NSPS officials that during the Dark Period, the regulation writers would seclude themselves from further discussion and data collection to create draft proposals for NSPS. It was the full intention of NSPS officials to cut-off communication with all employees groups and interests during this time, which would have continued until the publishing of the final proposals in the Federal Registrar.

II.) The Pentagon states that it held focus group sessions and town hall meetings to collect a "broad range of perspectives and experiences" prior to beginning the effort to draft regulations. These statements are intentionally misleading.

First, the town hall meetings and focus groups were held during a time when NSPS officials admitted that a large team of writers had been assembled for months before the commencement of the focus groups and meetings. The "effort to draft regulations" was initiated before the focus groups and town hall meetings occurred. The statement that all of these efforts by the Pentagon were "conducted prior to the beginning of the effort to draft proposals" is a fabrication.

Second, the Pentagon has scheduled for the completion of the writing period by the "end of the calendar year (2004)," however they continue to schedule town hall meetings in January of 2005, seemingly separately from any timeline to consider feedback and evaluate options. If the purpose of the town hall meetings was truly to "consider a broad range of perspectives and experiences" before writing, it would not be necessary to schedule town hall meetings after the completion date for the proposals. There is no indication that the intent of the town hall meetings was anything more than a platform from which to dictate vague details about the implementation of NSPS. The UDWC saw no evidence of any effort to gather feedback or suggestions of any kind from employees or managers.

Reports from those who attended the town hall meetings said that the meetings were mostly scripted events with pre-planned questions from planted members in the audience. Some union participants reported being ignored when requesting to speak, and several reported intimidation tactics by installation officials to persuade employees to not ask questions. Most employees felt that the meetings were worthless and that no attempt to gather information from employees was made.

Third, the focus groups were glaringly absent of union members even though unions represent a vast majority of Defense Department employees, and unions were prohibited from working with NSPS officials in any way when the unions asked to participate with the planning, administering and review of data gathered from the focus groups. The unions were also denied the locations and dates of the focus groups and town hall meetings until a few days before the projects commenced. In addition, the questions asked of participants were written in such a way to only demonstrate the potential benefits, and not any potential negatives, of changing to a new system.

What is important to note about the letter from Wolfowitz and James is the continuing effort to create the image that Pentagon officials are working hard with unions and employees to formulate the new personnel system. Nothing could be further from the truth. During the past year, since they rescinded their original draft proposals out of fear of corrective legislation from Congress to restrict their perceived authority, NSPS officials have not provided any information about the new system other than vague "guiding principles" of what they believe they are empowered to do.

The unions continue to be frustrated with the Pentagon's effort to create a facade that NSPS officials are listening and that healthy debate has ensued. Navy Secretary Gordon England promised the UDWC that NSPS planning would be "event-driven" and not driven by timelines. Interestingly enough, the only consistent and substantive information we have received from NSPS officials is a definite timeline for implementation reflected carefully, month by month, through 2006.

It is the belief of the UDWC that Defense officials will continue to be dismissive of the rights of their employees and their representatives, just as they have been dismissive, although fearful, of the Constitutional right of Congress to regulate their authority.

The next meeting between the UDWC and management is scheduled for Tuesday, December 14th from 9am to 4pm at the Ritz Carlton Hotel, Pentagon City, Virginia.

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