



# THE GOVERNMENT STANDARD

Vol. LXX, No. 5

September/October 2003

for current and retired government workers and their families since 1933  
American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO

## Gage Elected National President

**J**ohn Gage was officially sworn in as the 14th National President of the American Federation of Government Employees on the morning of August 21, 2003, one day after defeating incumbent **Bobby L. Harnage, Sr.** by 10,538 votes. Gage is set to lead the largest federal employees' union in the United States.

Before being elected National President at the National Convention in Las Vegas, Gage was in office for over 20 years running the largest AFGE Local in the country. As President of **Local 1923**, Gage represented some 30,000 employees at the Social Security Administration (SSA), Centers for Medicare

and Medicaid Services (formally HCFA), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Department of Defense (DoD), and the National Mediation Board.

Gage has negotiated state of the art contracts, testified before Congress, and has successfully organized multiple new units. A former AFGE National Vice President, Gage serves as Vice President on the Executive Board of the Baltimore Metro Central Labor Body and is a member of the SSA/AFGE Union Management Committee. Gage plans to launch an aggressive assault against the Bush Administration and its policies to dismantle critical government services to the public.

"AFGE has the responsibility to let the American public know what is really going on with government," Gage said. "SSA is



John Gage

being starved of resources. VA hospitals are being threatened with closures. Billions of taxpayer dollars are being dumped into the pockets of defense contractors. And, public services are being directly converted to 'for-profit' corporations.

"AFGE will make it clear to the American people that the Bush Administration's efforts to privatize half of our government's workforce have nothing to do with saving money or improving services," Gage added. "It's all about political payoffs for well-connected campaign contributors. Further, Bush's efforts to eliminate collective bargaining rights have nothing to do with 'flexibility' and everything to do with outright de-unionization."

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Jim Davis

### Davis, Brooks Re-elected

**C**onvention delegates re-elected **Jim Davis** to a second term as National Secretary-Treasurer. Women's/Fair Practices Director **Andrea Brooks** will also begin a second term after winning re-election by acclamation, however, with a new title—National Vice President for Women and Fair Practices.



Andrea Brooks



For complete convention information, log onto [www.afge.org](http://www.afge.org).



## A Message from National President John Gage

John Gage

# It's Our Turn!

The transition period in AFGE from one President to another lasts about an hour. The election on Wednesday of the Convention week was over at about 10:00 p.m. The next morning I chaired the Convention. Despite the closeness of the election, the tone was not rancorous or divisive. The respect and kindness shown to President **Bobby L. Harnage, Sr.** was a testament to the unity and fraternity of our union. Each member should be proud of their delegates for the hard work, the high quality of debate representing all of our diverse parts, and the hard decisions collectively made.

After a brief stop back home in Baltimore, I headed for Denver to talk to the National Convention of Blacks in Government (BIG). Reaching out to potential allies is important. I was very well received by BIG and I appreciate

not only the hospitality but the joint commitments made to work more closely together.

Back in Washington, I was greeted with a Labor Day present from President **Bush**—a plan to reduce our 2004 pay to a paltry two percent. The holy hell raised by our fine lobby staff, our new Communications Department, and the stalwart efforts of Senators **Ted Stevens** (R-Alaska), **Barbara Mikulski** (D-Md.) and **Paul Sarbanes** (D-Md.), and Representatives **Bill Young** (R-Fla.), **Steny Hoyer** (D-Md.), **Frank Wolf** (R-Va.), **Jim Moran** (D-Va.) and **Tom Davis** (R-Va.), moved Congress to not only restore the 4.1 percent but also to include wage grade, the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

We also quickly set in motion a hard push for Senator **Susan Collins'** (R-Maine) amendment that would restore critical employee rights to the so-called Rumsfeld Plan that was attached to the DoD Authorization bill. Again using radio ads, and an accelerated grassroots lobbying by our DoD Locals, we hope to seriously influence Senator **John Warner** (R-Va.) and the rest of the House/Senate Conferees to support the Collins amendment and block the return of the patronage system within DoD.

Our cause and message on this issue should be taken up by every federal employee since the outcome of this fight in DoD is a harbinger for all federal agencies. All of AFGE owes much appreciation to **Don Hale** and his grassroots colleagues in DoD for their splendid cooperation and efforts in carrying the fight against this insidious attack on employee rights within DoD and the whole civil service.

On a similar front, the new personnel system in the Department of Homeland is on the front burner. Top AFGE staffers are working our interests from inside DHS and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). The tortuous process set up by DHS gives only lip service to the union and we are extremely wary of being set up as participants in a process whose outcome is already predetermined. Check AFGE's Web site, [www.afge.org](http://www.afge.org), for the hard details of yet another critical challenge.

The amendment by Representative **Chris Van Hollen** (D-Md.) that passed the House was a huge win for federal employees. Sending the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) back to the drawing board on their new A-76 rules for contracting out was a stunning rejection of the over the top move by the Bush Administration to hand over core government functions and a flood of taxpayers' dollars to contractors. AFGE lobbyists **Beth Moten** and **John Threlkeld** carried the Van Hollen amendment on their backs through a web of parliamentary impediments. Twenty-six Republican lawmakers sided with AFGE, saying enough to OMB contracting out mandates and the one-sided A-76 rules.

This is a rug cutting time for federal employees. We either stand up or give up. We can win! We can turn this tide around. Support your union, contribute financially to our PAC, pick up that phone, write that letter, attend that demonstration. Don't let your job and your family's future go over the cliff like miserable lemmings. Events are moving quickly. Your union is moving just as fast. I need you.

### AFGE-The Government Standard

Vol. LXX, No. 5

September/October 2003

AFGE-The Government Standard (USPS 003-219, ISSN 1041-5335) is published bimonthly and is the official membership publication of the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO, 80 F Street, NW, Washington, D.C., 20001 Phone: (202) 737-8700, [www.afge.org](http://www.afge.org). John Gage, **National President**, Jim Davis, **National Secretary-Treasurer**, Andrea E. Brooks, **National Vice President for Women and Fair Practices**. **National Vice Presidents:** District 2-Derrick F. Thomas, (732) 828-9449; NY, NJ, CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT. District 3-Jeffrey R. Williams, (610) 660-0316; DE, PA. District 4-Joseph Flynn, (410) 480-1820; MD, NC, VA, WV. District 5-Charlotte Flow-ers, (770) 907-2055; AL, FL, GA, SC, TN, Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico. District 6-Arnold Scott, (317) 542-0428; IN, KY, OH. District 7-Dorothy James, (312) 421-6245; IL, MI, WI. District 8-Terrence L. Rogers, (952) 854-3216; IA, MN, NE, ND. District 9-Michael Kelly, (405) 670-2656; AR, KS, MO, OK. District 10-Roy Flores, (210) 735-8900; LA, MS, TX, NM, Panama. District 11-Gerald D. Swanke, (360) 253-2616; AK, CO, ID, MT, OR, UT, WA, WY. Guam, Okinawa. District 12-Eugene Hud-son, Jr., (760) 233-7600; AZ, CA, HI, NV. District 14-Russell Binion, (202) 639-6447; District of Columbia, Montgomery and Prince George's Counties in Maryland; Arlington and Fairfax Counties and the City of Alexandria in Virginia.

Produced by the AFGE Communications Dept.: Director, Enid Doggett; Assistant Director, Diane Witiak; Managing Editor & Communica-tions Specialist, John Irvine; Web Site Developers, Kurt Gallagher; Communications Specialist, Adele Stan; Staff Assistant, Kim Kennedy. Designed & union printed by Mount Vernon Printing Co., Landover, Md. Periodicals Postage Paid at Washington, D.C. **Postmaster:** send address changes to AFGE Data Processing Dept., 80 F Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20001.



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# AFGE News

## AFGE Files with U.N. Agency

AFGE, with the full support of the AFL-CIO and Public Services International (PSI), has filed a complaint against the U.S. government for violating international labor standards.

The precedent-setting complaint filed in mid-August with the International Labour Organization (ILO) charges administrations with denying eligible government employees the fundamental right to freedom of association—a principle set forth in the ILO conventions that all member states are required to comply with. The right to organize and the right to bargain collectively are included in the complaint.



The ILO is the United Nations agency dedicated to the international promotion of social justice and recognition of human and labor rights.

The current administration purports that union membership is compromising national security. Unions have been representing federal workers for 40 years—through the Cold War, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, the War on Terror and the War in Iraq. Union membership has never been inconsistent with national security.

The complaint will be considered by the ILO's Committee on Freedom of Association, which meets in November in Geneva, Switzerland. If the committee finds in favor of AFGE, the ILO governing body can ask the U.S. government to undertake measures to correct anomalies and may further monitor steps taken to correct violations.

## 22 Locals Bring in 600+ in Texas Election Wins in the VA and Army

AFGE District 10 recently held a successful membership drive that added 606 new members to AFGE. "So many people worked hard to make this successful," said District 10 National Vice President **Roy Flores**. A total of 22 AFGE Locals from the Dallas-Fort Worth area, as well as countless members, organizers and representatives, participated in the drive. Hats off to: EPA Local 1003 Pres. **Merrit Nicwander**; BoP Local 1006 Pres. **Chisam Tidwell**; BoP Local 1298 Pres. **Pat Showalter**; BoP Local 1637 Pres. **Rodney Calston**; DCMA Local 2128 Pres. **Larry Johnson**; DoL Local 2139 Pres. **Dan Burrell**; GSA Local 2488 Pres. **Aquilla Brook**; SSA Local 2727 Pres. **Dana McCracken**; VAMC Local 2836 Pres. **Roger Hooper**; AAFES Local 2921 Pres. **Robert Maier**; HUD Local 3320 Pres. **Phillip Aguirri**; INS/DHS Local 3377 Pres. **Julie Cipriano**; and EEOC Local 3637 Pres. **Levi Morrow**.

Two more organizing victories: The first at the Dallas VA Medical Center, and Fort Worth Clinic where Local 2437 won a unit of VA professionals, including doctors by a vote of 117 to 77; and the second at the William Beaumont Army Medical Center, where AFGE won by a vote of 52 to 19.

## TSA is Targeting Veterans

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has been illegally trampling on the rights of our nation's veterans. In a class action suit filed on August 13, AFGE charged TSA with violating the Veterans' Preference Act, as well as the Aviation and Transportation Security Act, the Administrative Procedures Act, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, and the First and Fifth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution.

AFGE points out in its complaint that TSA is ignoring veterans' preference in its reduction-in-force (RIF) decisions and is RIFing older employees and union activists with spotless performance records. Retention registers have not been established, re-employment rights have been denied to employees let go, and absolutely no consideration is being given to an employee's length of federal service.

AFGE is asking the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia to forbid TSA Administrator James Loy from hiring new screeners who have not been previously laid off and also from laying off additional screeners. AFGE will continue to challenge TSA in the courts until the agency realizes that the laws of our nation apply to all citizens, including TSA screeners. Log onto [www.screenersunion.org](http://www.screenersunion.org) for more information on the lawsuit and AFGE's TSA campaign.



## Gage Addresses BIG

AFGE National President **John Gage** participated in the Blacks in Government (BIG) 25th Annual National Training Conference in Denver on August 27. His talk focused on the challenges government workers face due to state and municipal budget shortfalls caused by the economic slump and policies of the Bush Administration.

"At all levels, government employees are under siege," Gage said. "At best, those we hail as heroes—those charged with protecting the homeland and preparing for every contingency—are expected to do even more than in the past with the meager resources of today. At worst, those who make our government operate smoothly and provide the services Americans expect face the reality that their jobs could be sold off to well-connected contractors or that they could lose the job protections that shield them from internal office politics."

Gage fired up attendees when he highlighted the fact that the rich diversity in the federal workforce may soon be a thing of the past as critical affirmative action and equal employment opportunity laws are discarded by subcontractors hired through President Bush's privatization scheme. "President Bush's privatization policies are wrongfully targeting minorities and women," said Gage. "Blacks in Government may soon be forced to change its name to Blacks out of Government."

President Bush plans to privatize 850,000 federal jobs—roughly one-half the federal workforce—of which 17.7 percent are held by African-Americans, 6.7 percent by Hispanics, and 44 percent by women.



## Bush Proposes 2% Pay Increase—Anything More “Would Threaten Our Efforts Against Terrorism”

### House Passes 4.1%

“We’re not the enemy,” said AFGE National President **John Gage** just after President **Bush** announced that a pay raise larger than two percent for non-military federal employees in FY 2004 “would threaten our efforts against terrorism.” Bush proposed a 4.1 percent increase for the military.

The U.S. House of Representatives disagreed with Bush and passed a 4.1 percent increase for all federal employees, military and non-military alike, on September 9, 2003, by a vote of 381-39.

AFGE, which played a leading role in securing the pay increase in the House, thanks House Appropriations Committee members **Steny Hoyer** (D-Md.), **Frank Wolf** (R-Va.), **Jim Moran** (D-Va.) and Chairman **Bill Young** (R-Fla.) for their roles in securing a raise for ALL federal employees in every agency.

The Senate Transportation, Treasury and General Government Appropriations Committee also approved an amendment to provide all federal employees with the same 4.1 percent pay increase in 2004, regardless of where they work or what pay system they are under. AFGE thanks Chairman **Ted Stevens** (R-Alaska), Ranking Member **Robert Byrd** (D-W.Va.) and Senators **Richard Shelby** (R-Ala.), **Barbara Mikulski** (D-Md.), **Susan Collins** (R-Maine), **Daniel Akaka** (D-Hawaii) and **Patty Murray** (D-Wash.) for their bipartisan efforts to secure the pay raise language in the Senate committee. A full Senate vote is expected in the upcoming weeks.

AFGE will now work tirelessly to get the full Senate to pass pay parity for all federal employees. For complete pay updates and information, be sure to log onto [www.afge.org](http://www.afge.org).

## Ridge Pulls Fast One on DHS Workers

“Crosstraining immigration, customs and agriculture inspectors is equivalent to crosstraining dentists, optometrists and podiatrists—they’re related, but very different,” said AFGE National President **John Gage** following Ridge’s surprise consolidation announcement of DHS inspectors.

Secretary **Tom Ridge** pulled a fast one on AFGE, and other federal employee unions involved in the development of the DHS personnel system (see below), by notifying AFGE while the news conference was taking place. “This consolidation has obviously been in the works for sometime and we were disappointed that we heard this through the media,” concluded Gage.

## DHS Personnel System Update

Much has happened over the summer in developing the new DHS personnel system. A workgroup comprised of staff from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), DHS, as well as AFGE and other union leaders, conducted nationwide research that included numerous town hall meetings and 60 focus groups. AFGE, which had 11 representatives in this stage of the process, has been working with the workgroup to submit countless personnel options to the Senior Review Committee in September. A small group, including AFGE’s National President **John Gage** and top officials from DHS and OPM, will consider the list of options and discuss AFGE’s views before trying to come up with a list of recommendations for Secretary **Tom Ridge** and OPM Director **Kay Coles James**.

The town hall meetings began in El Paso, Texas, on May 28, and included stops in Atlanta, Norfolk, Miami and New York before finishing up in Seattle and Los Angeles in late June. Probably the most illuminating part of the town hall meetings actually came after the meetings—during the focus groups. Six focus groups were held after each town hall meeting, with ten to 15 participants, which typically included between one and three members of AFGE. One focus group was for managers-only, while the remaining five were comprised of frontline workers (in some cities, the groups were mixed). DHS and union representatives were allowed to observe the frontline worker groups. However, the union was banned from the managers-only session.

*(Continued on page 6)*

## AFGE Retiree Program—Update

Progress is being made in organizing AFGE retirees. The program has contacted the offices of all 12 AFGE National Vice Presidents requesting retiree coordinators, and the retiree Web site has been officially updated. A retiree information table was set up at AFGE’s National Convention to provide retirees and Locals with more details on the program. A survey was conducted and program literature was distributed. Active and retired members received a great deal of information on how their Locals

have structured retirees, what their dues are, what they are interested in, and how they can best be contacted.

“This is an exciting program and the reception by retirees and Locals has been uplifting,” said AFGE Retiree Program Coordinator **Stan Gordon**. “Many Locals have indicated that they would welcome a structure that will enable them to retain retiring members.” For more information on AFGE’s Retiree Program and how it can help your Local, log onto [www.afge.org](http://www.afge.org).

### DHS Personnel System Update *(Continued from page 5)*

The professionally-facilitated focus group discussions covered the four areas up for change: pay and classification, performance management, labor relations, and discipline and appeals, a.k.a. adverse action. Several reoccurring themes emerged. The first was a deep suspicion of pay-for-performance or pay banding. One former special customs agent said, "In a perfect world, pay-for-performance might work. In my universe, I couldn't identify any place where pay-for-performance would work." Another theme was the General Schedule (GS). For the most part, participants felt the GS pay system was a fair one, although they expressed a desire for pay that was more comparable to the private sector, as well as the ability to reward exceptional performers more consistently and frequently.

Favoritism came up often. Participants repeatedly said they regularly witnessed favoritism on the part of managers and expressed concern that this bias could affect their salary under a pay-banding system and the adverse action process. Moreover, since the focus groups included many workers not represented by a union (including airport screeners), much of the discussion involved the growing frustration of not being provided the same rights and protections as union members.

Overall, the focus groups suggested that while the current system has some flaws, it is relatively fair and the rights of the employees are protected. Any efforts to strip employees of civil service protections would be met with deep resistance.

Following the completion of the town hall meetings and focus groups, a Field Review meeting was held July 15-16 in Washington, D.C., to discuss the personnel options in greater depth. Frontline union leaders, including ten from AFGE Councils and Locals, participated in the meeting with officials from DHS and OPM. During the last week of July, an AFGE-only DHS Training was held in Washington, D.C. The 50 AFGE members who attended were briefed on the current state of the DHS process. An AFGE town hall meeting was held with then-President **Bobby L. Harnage**, Under Secretary for Border & Transportation Security **Asa Hutchison** and Under Secretary for Management **Janet Hale**. AFGE members received in-depth updates from the Design Team on the status of the process and attended workshops on communications, legislation, and mobilizing potential AFGE members.

## Communities Do Better When Unions are Stronger

Statistics show that states with more union members have higher wages, better benefits and better schools. While unions are just one factor affecting the quality of living, the pattern indicates that when employees have a voice at work, the community also benefits. And when employers interfere in workers' decisions to join a union, the community loses—living standards decline and income inequality grows. Below are the ten strongest union states compared with the ten weakest.

	10 States Where Unions Are Strongest	10 States Where Unions Are Weakest
Average Hourly Earnings, 2000	\$15.61	\$12.49
Average Household Income, 2000	\$46,378	\$38,854
Percent of population with no medical insurance, 1999-2000	11.8%	15.1%
Public education spending per pupil, 2000-2001	\$8,265	\$5,774
Percent of eligible voters who voted in presidential election, 2000	55.2%	49.2%
Crimes per 100,000 people	4,114	4,694
Percent of population in poverty, 1999	10.6%	13.3%
Maximum weekly unemployment insurance benefit in 2002	\$379	\$296
Maximum weekly workers' compensation benefit in 2001	\$675	\$486
Workplace fatality rate in 2000 (per 100,000 workers)	4.6	6.3

**Ten States Where Unions are Strongest** (based on percentage of workforce with a union): New York, Hawaii, Alaska, Michigan, New Jersey, Washington, Illinois, Rhode Island, Ohio and Minnesota.

**Ten States Where Unions are Weakest** (based on percentage of workforce with a union): North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Texas, Mississippi, Arizona, South Dakota, Arkansas, Florida and Utah.

Reprinted from August 2003 *America @ Work*. Sources: Kathleen O'Leary and Scott Morgan, *State Rankings*, 2001; U.S. Census Bureau, *Income of Households by State in 2000*; Kaiser Family Foundation Health Fact Online, *Percent of Uninsured*, 1999-2000; Voter turnout in 2000 from [www.fairvote.org/tournout/preturnstate.htm](http://www.fairvote.org/tournout/preturnstate.htm); Unemployment insurance benefits in 2002 from Maurice Ensellem, Jessica Goldberg, Rick McHugh, Wendell Primus, Rebecca Smith and Jeffrey Wenger, "Failing the Unemployed: A State-by-State Examination of Unemployment Insurance Systems," March 12, 2002, Economic Policy Institute, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and National Employment Law Project; Workers' compensation benefits in 2001 from AFL-CIO, "Workers' Compensation and Unemployment Insurance Benefits Under State Law, January 1, 2001"; Workplace fatality rates from AFL-CIO, "Death on the Job: The Toll of Neglect," April 2002.

A report released in late-July found that there is far less news about the federal government than there used to be on the evening network news broadcasts and on the front pages of national and regional newspapers. In addition, news reporting on the federal government tends to focus largely on the Executive Branch, to be negative in tone and increasingly judgmental. The use of unnamed sources in television and print news is also decreasing.

These are some of the key findings from *Government: In and Out of the News*, a study released July 23, by the Washington-based Council for Excellence in Government that looks at how news coverage of the federal government has changed in the past 20 years.

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 reversed the trend, but only for the Executive Branch. Before the attacks, the media were on track to produce more than 40 percent less government coverage than they carried 20 years ago. The report also notes that overall evaluations of the federal government were negative by a 2-to-1 margin and evaluations

## Media Coverage of Federal Government is Decreasing

of institutions (“the government” or “the White House” for example) were more negative than those directed at individual officials.

“Television and newspapers are the modern civics teachers for most of us, and are by far the most effective and influential voices in bringing ordinary citizens information—and shaping their opinions—about government. So from time to time, it’s



important to take a look at how the news media is covering government,” said **Patricia McGinnis**, President and CEO of the Council for Excellence in Government.

The study was conducted for the Council for Excellence in Government by **S. Robert Lichter**, President of the Center for Media and Public Affairs, and **Stephen Farnsworth**, Associate Professor of Political Science, at Mary Washington College. It was funded by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts.

The study used one of the most comprehensive datasets brought to bear on questions of how the news media have covered government. An overall sample of nearly 30,000 news stories (television and print) was examined.

The Council for Excellence in Government works to improve the performance of government at all levels, as well as government’s place in the lives and esteem of American citizens. For more information on the Council and the study, *Government: In and Out of the News*, log onto [www.excelgov.org](http://www.excelgov.org).

## 2004 AFGE Delegate Selection Registration Form

Are you interested in attending a political party national convention in 2004? If so, please fill out this registration form and fax to **Martin J. Dunleavy**, AFGE Political Affairs Director, at (202) 639-6492. You can also e-mail the information to **Kristin Nabers**, Asst. Coordinator of Campaigns & Elections, at [NaberK@afge.org](mailto:NaberK@afge.org) or mail it to the Political Affairs Department, 80 F St, NW, Washington, D.C. 20001.

**The deadline for submitting delegate forms is November 14, 2003.** For additional information, contact your District National Vice President (NVP) or call the Political Affairs Department at (202) 639-6407.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ 9-Digit Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Congressional District: \_\_\_\_\_

AFGE Local: \_\_\_\_\_ Party Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Presidential Choice: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a member of AFGE-PAC?  Yes  No

Have you ever been a delegate to a political party convention?  Yes  No

If yes, were you a county, state or national delegate? Please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you been active in party politics? \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

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