



## New Plot to Sell Out Veterans

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## A Message from AFGE's National President *J. David Cox Sr.*

In the frenzy of our everyday lives, it's hard sometimes to stop and think about what's in store for us next year, next month, or even tomorrow. But in a year when we will select a new President – our new boss – it's critical that we all find the time to think about what type of country we want.

I've been around long enough to know that everyone at AFGE doesn't have the same candidate in mind to do the job; we're a big tent after all, and all opinions are welcome. As the inevitably whittles down to two candidates, there will be no shortage of people trying to use our differences to divide us. Rather than getting lost in what divides us, we must unite around what brought all of us into the movement in the first place – the principles that make us all proud to be union.

We believe that all working people deserve to have a say at work. No one should have to check their Constitutional rights to freedom of speech and freedom of association at the shop door. Our union empowers hundreds of thousands of working people to speak up about workplace safety, promotions, and discriminatory practices without fear of unchecked reprisal from management. Together our voice is stronger than it could ever be apart.

We believe that we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers. If someone tries to hurt a member of our family, or treat them with anything less than the respect they deserve, they're going to hear it from us. So when a union sister is sexually harassed by a supervisor, or you're denied a promotion just because you're not part of the manager's inner circle, you know that your AFGE family has your back. An injury to one is an injury at all.

We believe in a better future for our children. If it were up to Congress, we would have no pensions, pay for 100% of our health care costs, and hundreds of thousands of us would be out of work. If not for the hard work of thousands of AFGE activists across the country, our families would be condemned to a future far worse than we can imagine. A future built together is the only future worth living.

Our union's greatness is, was, and always will be defined by our capacity to overlook our differences and unite in solidarity around what connects us all. This November, we have a chance to make history once again.

When you enter that voting booth, remember to vote your hopes, not your fears; vote your aspirations for the future, not your grievances of the past; vote to build a better America for everyone, not just the privileged few. Your vote is your voice, and it is a terrible thing to waste.

Real change begins with each of us doing our part, and when we stand together as one union family, there is no feat we cannot accomplish.

In solidarity,

### AFGE—THE GOVERNMENT STANDARD

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## AFGE Win Brings Hope to Families of Children with Autism



AFGE member Lutreva Byrd and her son Emanuel.

If your child's well-being were at stake, how long would you fight for them? Would you ever give up?

Lutreva Byrd has spent years trying to find the best treatment for her 9-year-old son, who was diagnosed to be on the autism spectrum at three years old. But, like millions of Americans who struggle to pay for health care, Byrd just couldn't afford the treatment her doctor told her was her son's best hope.

***"It has been so challenging because you never want your child to be left behind and you want the hope of knowing they have chance at opportunities just like everyone else," Byrd said.***

As a federal employee in Alabama, her health insurance under the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program does not cover Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA), the most effective known treatment for Autism Spectrum Disorders. There is an ABA treatment center and a school in Byrd's hometown of Huntsville. It's convenient and nearby, yet her family can't pay the \$1,400 in monthly fees. Regular appointments with an ABA specialist, at \$300 a visit, also are out of reach.

But Byrd has never given up – and neither have her union brothers and sisters. AFGE has spent 10 years convincing the Office of Personnel Management to issue a new rule requiring all FEHBP carriers to provide coverage for ABA. After a decade of dogged

action, OPM finally relented, giving parents like Byrd the ABA coverage their children need starting in 2017.

"I was overwhelmed with joy, to be honest, because I wanted to start my son in this type of treatment as he is still under the age of 10," said Byrd, assistant vice president of AFGE Local 1858. "I am so excited about what AFGE is doing for all federal employees and I want to be an asset to aid others, as knowledge coupled with unity equates to power."

Michael Wilson, an AFGE member from Massachusetts, can relate. As a parent of three children, two of whom are on the autism spectrum, this new coverage comes as a welcome relief.

***"I cannot tell you how many times my wife and I have called ABA treatment centers for our children just to be turned away because we lack the coverage," said Wilson, a correctional officer at Devens Medical Center, a federal prison.***

As the legislative coordinator for Local 222, Wilson knows the power of persuasion and determined action.

"This is why I love and support my union," Wilson said. "There is something to be said with strength in numbers and real solidarity, normal people sticking together fighting the good fight. Well, it pays off."



From left to right Sean, Liam and Evan Wilson. Sean and Liam have Autism spectrum disorder.

# Inside the Plot to Sell Out Veterans' Health Care

When politicians in Washington decide to send our troops into battle overseas, a promise is made. Our armed forces risk life and limb to “support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies,” and in exchange they will be taken care of when they return.

Now, some Koch-backed politicians on Capitol Hill are trying to break that promise to our veterans and sell them out to private, for-profit hospitals. And they are frighteningly close to succeeding.

In 2014, the “secret waitlist” scandal rocked the VA. As millions of new veterans returned home from the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan, too few caregivers were hired to meet the demand. After months of work by veterans’ groups and our

union, Congress finally agreed to fund the VA and fill the care gap. The VA has made slow but steady progress ever since: adding 13,940 additional health care staffers, completing more than 97 percent of appointments within 30 days, and increasing night and weekend clinical hours for veterans by 5.7 percent.

Despite the progress, a well-funded conspiracy of anti-government groups and politicians has plotted a strategy to exploit the waitlist issue and privatize the VA for good. The Koch Brothers’ fake veterans’ group, Concerned Veterans for America, and their mouthpieces in Congress launched a brutal smear campaign against the VA, painting it as a hapless bureaucracy that could never be fixed. The reality, of course, could not be further from the truth.

According to a recent Vet Voice Foundation survey of veterans, 64% were opposed to privatizing VA medical centers and services. When asked whether they would like a voucher in place of their coordinated VA care, an overwhelming 80% of respondents said no. This is in addition to staunch opposition to privatization by the eight largest veterans’ organizations in the country.

It would make sense then, with veterans, VSOs, and VA caregivers agreeing that the VA must stay, that we would be working toward making it better, not tearing it down. Unfortunately, that’s not the case.

The most imminent threat emerged just last month

**THE**  **Every veteran.**  
**TREATS** **Every war.**  
**Every injury.**

**Defend the promise of good health care for our veterans.**

out of the so-called “Commission on Care,” a group of political appointees tasked with developing recommendations for improving veterans’ health care. But this is no “independent” blue ribbon commission; it is rife with glaring conflicts of interest and undue political influence.

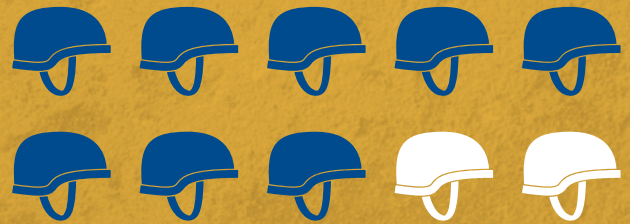
Of the 15 Commission appointees, four are high-level private hospital executives who stand to profit from privatization. One is openly on the payroll of the Koch-funded Concerned Veterans for America. Even worse, not a single mainstream Veterans Service Organization has a seat at the table. Just last month, pro-privatization members of the Commission met in secret to develop the so-called “strawman document,” a proposal that would shutter VA medical centers and instead give veterans a coupon to shop for their care. This shocking proposal would divert billions of public dollars to for-profit health insurance companies while forcing veterans returning from overseas to struggle with fractured care from private, for-profit VA providers lacking experience treating the unique needs of the veteran population.

Commission members who disagree with privatization have been subject to unprecedented bullying by pro-privatization lawmakers like House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Jeff Miller, who in a recent letter berated a committee member for an anti-privatization article a colleague wrote for *Washington Monthly*. This blatantly partisan interference and intimidation further diminishes the Commission’s work, and calls the entire process into question.

How can we the people in good faith support this Commission when it is clearly designed to benefit the rich and powerful, and not our veterans? It is the very definition of the fox guarding the hen house, and our veterans stand to lose the most. As the saying goes, if you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu.

Making matters worse, Miller and his Senate ally Marco Rubio are now targeting the very employees who exposed the wait list problem in the first place. Their bills – H.R. 1994 and S. 1082

# 8 in 10 Veterans Believe their health care should be paid for in full, not a voucher that may not cover all costs.



respectively – would make the entire VA workforce at-will employees who would have no meaningful protection from reprisals for blowing the whistle. The last thing we need is to give bad managers *carte blanche* to fire honest employees who just want to do right by the veterans they serve.

President Abraham Lincoln created the Department of Veterans Affairs to fulfill a promise: “to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan.” We must not allow a morally bankrupt group of politicians and shadowy billionaires to break that promise now.

**Call your lawmakers at  
202.224.3121**

**and tell them: do not privatize  
veterans’ health care by selling out  
veterans to the lowest bidder.**

**It’s time to properly  
fund and staff the VA!**

**IMPORTANT:** This information should not be downloaded using government equipment, read during duty time or sent to others using government equipment, because it suggests action to be taken in support or against legislation. Do not use your government email address or government phone in contacting your Member of Congress.

# Fighting for the Future of Our Democracy



**A**s the presidential primaries wind down and move into the party conventions this summer, it has never been more clear how critical this election will be for public servants and the future of our nation.

Many politicians have made a career of vilifying public servants and dismantling the programs that made our country great. We've felt the disastrous results of their success: Sequestration, budget cuts, government shutdowns, eroded voting rights, and outright obstruction of the Constitution. The next generation is expected to be worse off than the generation before it for the first time since the Great Depression.

The attacks have been personal. Anti-government lawmakers on Capitol Hill have made repeated attempts to deny your pay, rob your retirement, and take away your most basic rights at work. Some have threatened to sell public services at TSA, the VA and Defense Department to deep-pocketed corporations. Adding insult to injury, lawmakers continue to blame public servants for all of our nation's problems.

We know the truth – that serving others is the most noble calling. We know that our country is at its best when hard-working people have wages that allow them to think not just about making ends meet today, but to plan for a better tomorrow. And, we know that America's success is not built by corporate profit margins or bonus packages for CEOs – it's built by everyday Americans who want to provide a better

life for themselves and the next generation.

It's easy to grow weary in an election year, but we must not stop pushing forward. The future of public service and our country depends on every AFGE member turning out the vote in November. The only way that we will turn this country around is if we knock on doors, make phone calls and speak up together for candidates who share our values.

Our union brothers and sisters are critical to our democracy. In a time when those with enough money can change the rules in their favor, we must stand up for all Americans. We must ensure that all citizens of this country can breathe clean air, eat and drink clean food and water, feel safe and secure in their communities, and have the same chance at life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness that was promised to us when our country was founded.



*AFGE members get out the vote in Colorado.*

# Big Enough to Win is Transforming Our Union



It's been almost three years since AFGE leaders and activists came together to devise the Big Enough to Win plan to confront growing threats to our families' livelihoods. Since then, our union has been firing on all cylinders. We're building a platform for success so that every member of our union can achieve a future they are proud of. Here are some highlights of what has been accomplished since 2013:



**302,429**  
Members Strong!



**21,033**  
More Members

**100** Videos produced nearly  
**850,000** views

**30** new workplaces joined AFGE

**625** Legislative Political Coordinators Recruited

**463%** Growth in Facebook Following

**45,261** Calls Made to Congress

**NEWS** **44,576** Media Appearances

**100,297** Emails Sent to Congress



# Working People Notch Rare Victory in Supreme Court



J. David Cox Sr. addresses activists on steps of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Americans are working harder than ever before, and it shows. Productivity has gone up, and so have corporate profits. What hasn't gone up is our paychecks, and it's getting harder and harder to get by, let alone get ahead. Simply put, the rules have been rigged by corporations and the rich to benefit themselves at the expense of working people.

But this spring, working people scored a rare victory and stopped (for now) one of the largest economic power grabs ever attempted. We're talking about *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*.

On March 29, in 4-4 split decision, the understaffed Supreme Court affirmed nearly 40 years of

constitutional law that says those who benefit from union representation must pay for that representation. It was a rare victory for working people these days, and one that could still vanish if Congress continues to refuse a nomination hearing for the vacant seat on the Supreme Court.

The split decision was narrowly upheld after the sudden death of Justice Antonin Scalia, who was likely to rule in favor of overturning the law. With similar Koch

Brothers-backed challenges to good labor law lying ahead, it is crucial that the Senate do its job and hold a hearing to consider President Obama's nominee, Chief Judge Merrick Garland. Garland is best known for his prosecutorial work in bringing justice to the families of the 99 federal employees killed in the Oklahoma City Bombing.

"There are too many pressing issues facing the court to allow a vacancy to linger until after the November presidential election," Cox said. "The 100 members of the U.S. Senate have a responsibility to do the job that the American people elected them to do. Anything less is a miscarriage of justice."

## National Vice President Eric Bunn Elected Treasurer of Metropolitan Washington Central Labor Council

AFGE District 14 National Vice President Eric Bunn has been elected treasurer of the Metropolitan Washington Central Labor Council, an organization that works with members of the AFL-CIO to create better workplaces for working people in the Washington, D.C. area. Bunn's decade of service makes him the longest-serving member of the council. In his new role as treasurer, Bunn continues the legacy of AFGE involvement in the Council. For many years, Jos Williams, former AFGE member, served as the Council's president. NVP Bunn has been a labor union activist for more than 25 years.



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## Meet Mr. 300,000



D-7 NVP Dorothy James and Matthew McDearmon.

When Matthew McDearmon sat down at his new employee orientation at the Bureau of Prisons last year, he wasn't expecting to become an official in his local union – much less the 300,000th member of AFGE.

## PRIDE in Who We Are!

Since the Women's and Fair Practices Departments started the AFGE Pride program in 2012, AFGE has proudly celebrated our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender family during LGBTQ Pride Month in June. AFGE hasn't wavered in the fight for justice and has become a more inclusive union where all of our members can feel valued and protected.

As the LGBTQ equality movement expands to take on civil rights issues like workplace discrimination and violence, gender neutral bathrooms, transgender health care and youth homelessness, anti-LGBTQ laws are popping up to strip basic rights from union and non-union workers alike.

Nearly 200 anti-LGBTQ bills have been filed in statehouses around the country creating an unsafe environment for LGBTQ people. We know that a union contract offers the best protection for LGBTQ workers, but these laws threaten the safety of American citizens outside of work. The time is now

McDearmon, an Air Force veteran and correctional officer at Administrative U.S. Penitentiary Thomson in Illinois, knows the power of teamwork. To him, joining in union with his colleagues was just the beginning of making a better workplace today and building a brighter future for the next generation of public servants.

"I think it's good to be a part of something that's bigger than yourself," he said. "You can learn the issues that are going on within the institution and the area and help solve any disconnects between yourself and the management."

McDearmon is a member of Local 4070, which was chartered less than a year ago in July 2015. When the local secretary position became available, McDearmon jumped at the opportunity to make a difference. The local's size and strength is growing steadily as workers negotiate their first contract with management.

McDearmon will be recognized as AFGE's 300,000th member at the 2016 AFGE National Leadership Meeting in Philadelphia in June.



to take action – to stop the attacks on public sector workers, women, people of color, low-wage workers, LGBTQ folks, our children's futures, and the labor movement.

We have to get active and involved by educating our coworkers, families, friends and neighbors. This year we're offering a one-day LGBTQ Training class as a part of the Human Rights Training. Learn more at [www.afge.org/diversityweek](http://www.afge.org/diversityweek) or [www.afge.org/pride](http://www.afge.org/pride).

# Fort Gordon Workers Protest Poisonous Buildings



AFGE members rally against poor workplace conditions at Fort Gordon.

**M**any of the buildings at Georgia's Fort Gordon are contaminated with asbestos and mold. Yet when workers complain, management retaliates. Workers have had enough.

"Employees are getting reprimanded for voicing an opinion and that's not OK," said Jaime Dukes, president of AFGE Local 2017, who was targeted

for termination in retaliation for raising concerns about the safety of employees at the installation. "Management is turning a blind eye, and they refuse to honor the contract we have in place."

In March, about 100 employees protested outside the base to call attention to the unsafe working conditions and poisonous management culture. The rally drew the support of the Georgia AFL-CIO and generated significant local news coverage.

AFGE District 5 National Vice President Everett Kelley, who joined in the rally, said he's hopeful that the public protest will convince management to sit down with the local to work out the issues. "No employee should have to work in buildings filled with mold, asbestos and unsafe infrastructure. Fort Gordon employees have rights, and I'm tired of seeing employees be penalized for bringing issues to the forefront," Kelley said.

## New Beginning for Evaluating Employee Performance at DoD

**C**onducting performance appraisals sounds about as fun as going to the dentist, but the impact of these employee evaluations can't be overstated. It's how the job determines if you should be rewarded for good work, disciplined for not meeting expectations, promoted to a better job, or fired from the one you have.

Over the next two years, most civilian employees at the Department of Defense will be moving into a new performance appraisal system, called New Beginnings.

Under New Beginnings, employees will be evaluated using a three-tier rating scale, instead of the pass/fail or 5-tier system currently in place for most workers. Employees will be involved in setting performance expectations each year and writing a self-assessment at the end of the cycle that the supervisor will consider in setting the final rating. Employees must meet at least three times with their supervisor each year to discuss progress toward performance goals and be given clear guidance on how to improve any

performance issues.

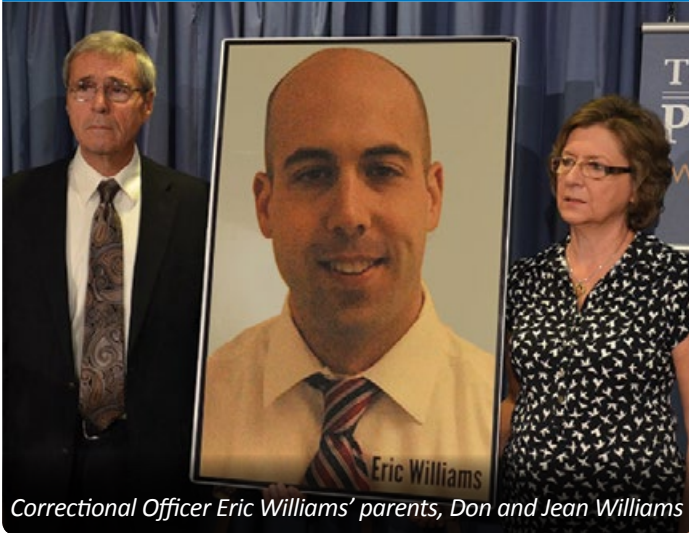
The stakes are high to make sure New Beginnings is successful. Some leaders within the Pentagon want to scrap the entire civilian personnel system and giving supervisors full authority to determine who is hired, fired, promoted, or demoted.

"We've got one shot to make sure this is done right or we may end up with a system that guts all of our existing rights and protections," said Don Hale, chairman of AFGE's Defense Conference (DEFCON).

AFGE and DEFCON have fought to ensure that locals are able to negotiate details of the new performance appraisal system before it's rolled out. About 15,000 employees already have moved into the new system, but the first major transition will be in April 2017, affecting about 280,000 employees.

AFGE has developed detailed training on the new system. Learn more at [www.afge.org/NewBeginnings](http://www.afge.org/NewBeginnings).

## From Tragedy to Triumph: The Legacy of Officer Eric Williams



Correctional Officer Eric Williams' parents, Don and Jean Williams

Correctional Officer Eric Williams was murdered by an inmate at UPS Canaan.

Following the murder, AFGE's Council of Prison Locals immediately called for increased staffing levels and pepper spray for self-defense, starting with a pilot program in medium and high security prisons in 2014. Because of AFGE member activism, the pilot program expanded – and the movement spread to Congress, where Sens. Pat Toomey and Bob Casey introduced the legislation.

It took three tries, but by February 2016, the bill had passed both the House and Senate and reached President Obama's desk to be signed into law. For Eric Williams' family, the bill's passage was a promise that no more correctional workers would go unprotected like their son had.

"After Eric was killed, I promised that I would do everything I could to help other officers come home safely to their families," said Eric's father, Don Williams. "With this bill now becoming a law, maybe no more families will have to go through what we did."

**A**fter three years of activism, AFGE triumphed with the passage of the Eric Williams Correctional Officer Protection Act.

The new law allows federal correctional officers and employees working in medium- and high-security prisons to carry pepper spray for self-defense. It also requires annual training in proper use of pepper spray.

The law was born from tragedy in 2013, when

## Fight for a 5.3% Catch-Up Pay Boost Gains Momentum

**A**FGE's bold push to get you a 5.3% catch-up adjustment next year is starting to gain traction on Capitol Hill.

In March, Sen. Brian Schatz of Hawaii introduced a bill that would provide salaried and hourly federal employees with a 5.3% catch-up adjustment in 2017. Sens. Ben Cardin and Barbara Mikulski of Maryland and Sherrod Brown of Ohio joined him in supporting his bill, S. 2699.

You know all too well the hit that your wallets have taken as a result of years of frozen wages and tiny pay raises that haven't even kept up with inflation. We've been keeping track, and so far you have racked up \$182 billion in lost wages and reduced benefits as a result of pay freezes, meager wage hikes, and mandatory increases in your retirement contributions.



That's why AFGE was the first group to call for a 5.3% catch-up adjustment.

"This adjustment will help employees catch up on their credit card bills, student loan debts, home repairs, and so many of the everyday costs facing working people," said AFGE President J. David Cox Sr. "This is not a gift – it's pay they earned."

AFGE



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