

BEN FRANKLIN STATION, BOX 7672, WASHINGTON D.C. 20044 - PHONE 202-566-2788
INTERNET <http://www.nteu280.org> E MAIL Murphy.JamesJ@epa.gov

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Inside The Fishbowl

Official Newsletter of NTEU 280

SPECIAL EDITION OF INSIDE THE FISHBOWL

NTEU 280 LEADERSHIP MEETS WITH EPA ADMINISTRATOR ([SEE BELOW](#))

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PRESIDENT Dwight Welch 566-2787

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT Dr. James J. Murphy 566-2786

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT Seth Thomas Low 566-2789

CHIEF STEWARD Rosezella Canty-Letsome 566-2784

VICE PRESIDENTS Linda Barr (703) 605-0768

Dr. Arthur Chiu, M.D. 564-3296

Al Galli 343-9771

Dr. Bill Hirzy 566-2788

Dr. Freshteh Toghrol (410) 305-2755

SECRETARY Jacqueline Rose 566-1232

TREASURER Dr. Bernard Schneider (703) 305-5555

EDITOR Seth Thomas Low 566-2789

MAIN UNION NUMBER (202) 566-2785

UNION FAX NUMBER (202) 566-1460

NTEU Chapter 280 Website: www.nteu280.org

NTEU National Website: www.nteu.org

FROM THE PRESIDENT, DWIGHT WELCH

Administrator and Assistant Administrator Invite Union Officers to
Lunch



NTEU 280 PRESIDENT DWIGHT WELCH MEETS WITH EPA ADMINSTRATOR STEPHEN JOHNSON

Administrator Stephen Johnson and Assistant Administrator for OARM Luis Luna invited the officers of both HQ unions to meet with them for a brown bag lunch on only their second full day in office. In addition to Steve and Luis, Ray Spears and Dave O'Connor were also in attendance for management. Representing NTEU Chapter 280 were Dr. Arthur Chiu, Jacqueline Rose, Seth Low, Dr. Bill Hirzy, Rosezella Canty-Letsome, Linda Barr, Al Galli, and myself. AFGE Local 3331 was represented by VP for Civil Rights, Dr. Marsha Coleman-Adebayo.

Mr. Johnson led off with the principles by which he would run his administration. At the top of the list was sound science. Mr. Johnson also felt that employees deserved the opportunity for candid conversation, that is being able to discuss perceived problems without fear of retaliation, certainly a new paradigm for EPA in particular and the government in general. Some discussion evolved about not having such conversations appear in *Inside the Fishbowl*. Both editor Seth Low and I indicated that "Some of NTEU 280's best accomplishments never get published in the *Fishbowl*"; we don't publish the off the record conversations without the prior consent of the manager or other named source. We agreed with the Administrator that in using informal discussion, more could be accomplished than when both sides "dig in." Mr. Johnson stated that he believes in collaboration and innovation.

Mr. Johnson stated his policy of strong but well targeted enforcement. He believes that such targeting would lead to a better allocation of resources. He stated that his focus was on results, that delaying agency action in the quest for the perfect solution to a problem is not good and that in that context, he noted that, "No decision is a bad decision." Mr. Johnson stated his commitment to balancing environmental policy with economic policy.

Mr. Johnson stated that he is a believer in union partnership and that we would get together on a quarterly basis. However, due to his schedule, that Luis Luna would be his point person on partnership issues. Mr. Johnson indicated that what makes this Agency successful is its employees and repeatedly praised their hard work and dedication.

Issues presented by the Unions included scientific integrity. Bill Hirzy commented that as the last of the charter members of the union at the meeting, he wanted to note that four of Steve's five principles of his administration were exactly consistent with why the union was organized in the early 1980's. He noted that the union has always stood for using the best science in

formulating environmental policy, for transparency in how decisions affecting the environment are made, for collaboration between the professional staff and political management protecting the public and for respecting the contributions of all EPA employees to the Agency's success.

Hirzy also pointed out that both the Principles of Scientific Integrity (PSI) training and our Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) are tools for helping employees and managers keep to the straight and narrow. He noted that the CBA requires that managers "...recognize their responsibility to ensure that all orders and instructions are consistent with law, rule, regulation, or Agency policy," and that the PSI training reminds us all that we must be cognizant of our programmatic laws and of our duty to report breaches of the PSI. He recommended that the training be mandatory, especially for managers, so we can avoid the problem we had a few years ago when a manager told an employee that it was the employee's duty to support the managers decisions, "Even if I say $2 + 2 = 7$."

Dr. Hirzy cited the case of malathion where Dr. Brian Dementi pointed out that a method previously rejected as bad science was being resurrected to set, using an extrapolation, a critical regulatory end-point at a level that ignores actual experimental data.

Marsha Coleman-Adebayo, the VP of Civil Rights for AFG 3331, discussed civil rights at EPA and enforcement of the NO FEAR Act. At that point I mentioned the quarterly meetings with Office Civil Rights (OCR) Director Karen Higginbotham and her Deputy, Gordon Schisler, with Seth and I, indicating that they were very productive. I suggested that perhaps the AFG 3331 VP of Civil Rights could also participate in these meetings. Seth also contributed to this discussion indicating how many times he and the Director of OCR agreed on issues and that honoring the ground rules of confidentiality has fostered frank and candid discussions with no need to talk "in code."

Al Galli discussed SES rotations. He also started the discussion about making alternative dispute resolution more successful by requiring the appropriate managers to attend. (Frequently employees are willing to cooperate in this process only to have it stone-walled by managers.) This precipitated a group discussion and management agreed that this was a project worthy of further partnership effort.

Jacqueline Rose asked if EPA was one of the first agencies to go to a 5 tier performance management system. Management indicated, "No, we are one of the last."

Time was tight and I had a number of issues that did not get presented including the sorry state of Labor Relations—all the experienced LR people have gone to other agencies. Why? Also, VP Linda Barr did not have a chance to discuss her frustration with the 4/10 negotiations—more than a YEAR AND A HALF have transpired without even agreeing to ground rules. These are issues that we are raising to Luis.

All the union officers I spoke with after the meeting expressed their sense that we have turned a corner at EPA and look forward to working with the Administrator and his senior staff, in protecting the environment in a work place that fosters integrity.