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Inside The Fishbowl

Official Newsletter of NTEU 280

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Note: Articles indicating authorship reflect the views of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editor, Editorial Board, or NTEU Chapter 280.

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Potomac Yard Agreement Signed

This agreement between the National Treasury Employees Union Chapter 280 and the EPA Headquarters establishes local procedures for the implementation and terms in connection with the Potomac Yard move.

Transportation – The Agency agrees to provide shuttle services between the VRE, Metro Station and Potomac Yard between the hours of 5:30 a.m. and 7:30 p.m.

The Agency's continued ability to provide funds for the shuttle service will be reviewed annually as part of the Agency's budget process.

Parking – Colonial Parking has committed to making 500 spaces available to EPA employees at a rate of \$95.00/month. This rate, available to individual drivers as well as carpools, compares equitably to the \$250.00/month charge for non-carpools and the \$87.00/month charge for carpools at the Ronald Reagan Building. The Agency will not be able to provide any offset to this monthly rate as we do for carpools in Reagan because the parking is separate from the Agency's leased space. EPA has a pending request at Colonial Parking to consider a reduced rate for motorcycles. EPA does not have any ability to control or oversee the parking at Potomac Yard. However, Colonial Parking has informed EPA they are very confident the 917 total spaces at the parking facility represent more than sufficient capacity to provide for any Agency employees assigned to Potomac Yard to rent parking space.

Alternate Work Space (AWS) – There will be no provisions for Alternate Workspace in Potomac Yard. The existing AWS at Crystal Station was a direct result of issues and conditions related to Waterside Mall. AWS is considered an accommodation so Program Offices/managers of employees currently in AWS will need to work with employees to identify an appropriate accommodation. This can include one of the 10 buildings in our Headquarters inventory.

Disabled Access to Restrooms – All restrooms in Potomac Yard are handicapped accessible and meet ADA requirements. One stall in every bathroom will accommodate a wheelchair, and the doors leading into the bathroom vestibule and into the bathroom are equipped with automatic openers. Employees will not have to travel more than 200 feet on one floor to reach a restroom.

Office Assignments – Offices will be assigned to managers/supervisors. Team Leaders do not fit this criterion and are therefore covered by the Collective Bargaining Agreement process. They

will generally not receive offices unless assigned to work on confidential personnel matters. Typically, only one office designated to this type of activity per Division will be available, office space may also be made available to bargaining unit employees working on confidential matters. Conference room space will be made available to bargaining unit employees for meetings, conference calls or similar needs. Any offices which are vacant after the move is complete or become vacant will be made available to bargaining unit employees if not filled by a supervisor or manager. Any offices filled will be offered by grade and seniority collectively. Should the agency reach an agreement with any of the other unions representing employees at the new facility which gives employees greater access to offices or provides space assignments on more favorable terms, the agency agrees that NTEU will have the option of accepting the same terms.

Union Office Space – One private office is designated for each of EPA’s bargaining units at the Potomac yards location.

Occupancy Dates/OPP Move – OPP’s 987 employees will move during the first week of May 2006. This unique effort is being done at the specific need and request of OPP so as to enable them to be operational and in place in time to meet their docket deadline. No OPP employee will be required to take personal leave during this period. OSWER’s move of approximately 470 employees will begin on May 18, 2006, and be completed by July 10, 2006. No OSWER will be required to use personal leave as a result of the move.

Lotus Notes – Everyone will receive a “thumb-drive” configured with the Lotus Notes client software and user-id file to support access to mail when away from the regular workstation (e.g. while on travel or at off-site meetings).

Health Unit – The Health Unit at Potomac Yard is located on the ground floor and at 900 sq. ft. is larger than the CM2 facility, but will have the same size operating staff, equipment and hours.

Fitness Center – The 3,500 sq. ft. Fitness Center at Potomac Yard is located on the ground floor and is considerably larger than the current center, but will have the same size operating staff, hours, and the same or comparable equipment. A plan of the layout is available on the Potomac Yard website. There will be no additional cost or fee for use of the new facility.

Women’s Shower/Locker Room Facilities – The women’s shower and locker room facilities are currently in the garage, and outside of the main part of the building. However, there is a women’s shower facility on the 4th Floor of Potomac Yard North that is available for those who may prefer to use it, and the women’s shower at the garage level will be equipped with a security controlled access. In addition, a security guard will be stationed 24/7 in the garage ramp area. Access to the bike storage room is equipped with a key pad access and key locks will be installed on the shower rooms.

Cafeteria – There is no available space to provide cafeteria services at Potomac Yard. However, many restaurants and eateries are available in the area.

Child Care Center – At the request of the union, the Agency will periodically (i.e., no less than every two years) review the potential employee interest in child care facilities.

Reconfiguration of Cubicles – Both OPP and OSWER are committed to and actively engaged in assignment of workstations as per the provisions of EPA’s Collective Bargaining Agreements, specifically by grade and seniority collectively.

Location of Copiers and Fax Machines – Potomac Yard has two copy machine rooms per floor with dedicated exhaust ventilation. In addition, smaller use copiers will be placed to assure they are set outside of the immediate breathing zone of occupants (generally beyond 3 feet); adequate space around the machines will be provided to promote ventilation; fan discharge ports will not be directed towards employees; and, multiple units will not be concentrated in one area. The newer generation of copiers produce much less in the way of emissions and are considerably more attractive from both the user and the environmental perspective.

Scooters – Scooters for the mobility impaired will be provided by the Program Offices, as needed.

Electrical equipment - Space heaters, coffee pots, tea kettles, emersion heaters, fans, toaster ovens, microwave ovens, refrigerators and other devises that draw large amounts of electricity or pose a leakage hazard will not be allowed. Radios and other audio equipment; clocks; chargers for small batteries, cell ‘phones, emergency lights, etc .; and other devices that do not draw a large amount of electricity will be allowed, as long as the electrical outlet utilized and connections are appropriate and of sufficient capacity to service the electrical needs of the office and are in compliance with established standards.

Confidential Business Information - EPA will continue to provide for the security and controlled access of CBI space; however, the determination as to where confidential documents or information may be secured is a management determination for the Program Office.

Most favorable terms agreement -Should the agency reach more favorable terms in an agreement concerning the new facility with any of the other unions representing employees at the new facility, the Agency agrees that NTEU will be offered the more favorable terms in addition to any terms offered in this agreement.

FOR THE AGENCY: FOR THE UNION:

Ruben Moreno Linda Barr,

Director, Labor and Employee Relations Vice President, NTEU, Chapter 280

Renee Page, Deputy Director, Freshteh Toghrol,

Office of Administrative Services Vice President, NTEU, Chapter 280

Change in Fishbowl Drafting and Review Process

At the Executive Board's April 18, 2006 meeting the Executive Board changed the drafting and review process regarding the Fishbowl. The Executive Board reaffirmed that it is the Editorial Board for the Fishbowl. In addition, before an issue goes out there will be a face to face meeting of the Executive Board (Ed Board) to discuss the edition and to approve the version that will go out. Approval will be by simple majority. This procedure will apply to all regular, special, and Fishbowl Splash editions of the newsletter.

Know Your Rights - Use of the Agency's Email System By the Editor

In the March 2006 Fishbowl edition I included excerpts from NTEU National's handbook guidance on newsletters and some cases on defamation and personnel actions resulting from defamation. In addition, our Collective Bargaining Agreement also provides a provision that is applicable to the Union regarding use of the Agency's email system. That provision is found in Article 7, Use of Official Facilities, Section 4, Union Use of Email, Paragraph C of the Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Section 4C provides as follows:

"The Union will ensure that no email will violate law or security of the employer, or contain scurrilous or libelous material or material maligning the integrity of any individual, the employer or the federal government."

Request for Input from OSRTI Staff Regarding Customer Service CJE

By way of background, as was reported in the March 2006 Fishbowl, I raised the Union concern that an OSWER professional behavior Critical Job Element (CJE) for OSWER's Office of Underground Storage Tanks, OUST, was not a CJE as provided in the Agency's PARS CJE guidance and should be delete. In response, the Director of the Office of Underground Storage Tanks (OUST) did, in fact, have his staff delete that CJE from their performance plans and apologized to them for creating additional work.

Now, it appears that one of OSWER's other offices, the Office of Superfund Remediation and Technology Innovation (OSRTI), has a Customer Service CJE that is very similar to the professional behavior CJE that was dropped by OUST, and consequently it appears that it too is not a real CJE and should be deleted from the performance plans of affected OSRTI staff. The text of the OSRTI Customer Service CJE is as follows:

- Responds to requests for assistance promptly and effectively as a team player. •
- Acquires/maintains knowledge of program mission and how assigned work impacts the mission.
- Honors commitments, follows through on assignments and meets deadlines. • Works

effectively and collaboratively with a diverse work force. • Responds to others' needs as a team player who is proactive. • Conducts briefings in a clear and concise manner. • Ensures time and attendance, including site-specific charges, are accurately reflected in People Plus. • Submits timely and accurate travel actions in the Agency travel management system. • Completes official correspondence on time and in the Agency correspondence management system as required. • Preserves organizational knowledge by following record management practices. • Maintains an up-to-date and accessible Lotus Notes calendar that accurately reflects relevant events, especially meetings, travel, and compressed work schedule. • Maintains a current voice mail greeting that accurately reflects availability. Ensures extended absence greetings are used when away from the office for more than one day. • Follows EPA customer service practice of responding to customers. • Completes the annual IT security awareness, ethics, and other required training on time. • Completes/updates financial disclosure form as required. • Attends at least one diversity training activity for the year.

If you are an OSRTI employee and have the above Customer Service CJE as part of your performance plan, please send an e-mail to me (Seth Low) to let me know.

If you are not an OSRTI employee, but also have a similar Customer Service CJE please contact me by email as well. In your email, please indicate what AAship and office you are with and, if possible, attach a copy of the text of your specific Customer Service CJE.

It is very possible that the Agency is not following its own PARS guidance and, if so, the Union needs to know so we can address that issue.

Scientific Integrity – Whom Can You Trust ?

The New York Times cited a “credibility gap” in the publishing of scientific literature in an article on May 2, 2006. They noted that conflicts of interest may make error and “spin” more likely, and that peer review is not the safeguard of accuracy, honesty, candor and completeness that general readers and nonscientists may believe or hope that it would be. Prominent among the critics were the former editor of the British medical journal and the current editor of The Lancet, a medical journal highly respected on both sides of the Atlantic.

“If peer review were a drug, it would never be marketed, say critics, including journal editors.” The idea of peer review is intended to weed out inferior, mediocre and fraudulent studies. That does not always happen, for several reasons. Journal editors “do not routinely examine authors scientific notebooks,” contrary to the popular impression (encouraged by the journals themselves) that their system of editing is superior. “Publish or perish” and the desire to show results for financial support by public or private sources militate against critical vigilance. Journal editors have at times had conflicts of interest.

Science eventually finds and corrects its errors, but it may take years and it may require the contributions of whistleblowers or of attorneys in patent suits or torts. In the meantime, the errors are circulated or amplified by the authors of new papers who cite unreliable works, some of which had been retracted earlier. The New York Times article gives the example of the National Institutes of Health having committed millions of dollars in support of studies of a supposed

familial link in sudden infant death syndrome, based on a flawed study. There was a familial link, but not the kind that NIH could help with – the infant deaths in the family cited were due to the mother’s smothering her children, one after the other, a series of murders for which the mother was convicted 23 years later.

[Reviewer’s comment by Jim Murphy:

There is a saying that a difference of opinion is an opportunity, not a calamity. It takes some effort to hold the door open to differences of opinion, especially when the peer reviewers are rivals of the investigators whose work they are reviewing. The “Law” of Standardization of Error holds that mutually agreed upon error is often more convenient than truth. This would seem to be the case, for example, in the case of adverse effects of ingested fluoride, which have gone officially unrecognized for decades in spite of extensive documentation in Christopher Bryson’s book, *The Fluoride Deception*.]

NTEU Files Letter With EEOC Documenting OARM’s Official Position That The Office of International Affairs Does Not Have its Own Detail Policy

James J Murphy, Executive Vice-President of Chapter 280 of the National Treasury Employees Union used the information-gathering authorities of federal law and NTEU’s collective bargaining agreement (CBA) to work cooperatively with the EPA’s Labor Relations (OARM) to penetrate the veil supported by the EPA Office of General Counsel (OGC) in a case pending before the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

OGC had supported an assertion that OIA had its own unique policy on extending the duration of details which would require that any such extension must be advertised.. The Union looked at this assertion more closely and were told by the EPA Office of Administration and Resources Management (OARM) that OIA's does not have its own detail policy, but uses the same as applies in the rest of EPA headquarters, so that an additional step of advertising the detail extension is not required. The Agency’s detail policy can be found at <http://intranet.epa.gov/policy/staffing/M300-14.htm> This reference was provided to the Union by Labor Relations Specialist Marcelle Castillo.

The Union suggested, therefore, that OGC should amend its letter brief in light of the Office of International Affairs not having a requirement that detail extensions must be advertized. This illustrates the value added of the Union to sort out contradictory statements from the Agency. The Union appreciates OARM's cooperative attitude and recognizes OARM and OARM Labor Relations Specialist Marcelle Castillo with thanks for promptly providing documentation to set the record straight. We understand that the complainant used the NTEU letter and OARM supporting documentation in a brief to oppose the position taken by OGC.

Imagine Life As A Federal Employee Without NTEU

We are often asked the question what has NTEU done for me. The short answer is a lot of the protections and benefits that are taken for granted are the result of NTEU. So, imagine life as a federal employee without NTEU and the following could be some of the consequences.

- NO alternative work schedules
- NO input into addressing unhealthy work site
- NO fair evaluations and promotions
- NO grievance process
- NO impartial arbitration hearings
- NO voice on Capitol Hill for pay, benefits and worklife quality issues
- NO respect and dignity in the workplace
- NO negotiations over changes in working conditions
- NO protection against arbitrary reassignments, unfair discipline or adverse actions
- NO effective way for you to participate in decisions affecting your family and career
- NO higher Thrift Savings Plan
- NO transit subsidy

So which of these workplace protections and benefits can you live without? Support the Union that supports you. Be active in NTEU.

NTEU and Money in Your Pocket

NTEU is a strong supporter of fair and equitable wages for federal employees and has been very effective in successfully affecting Administration pay proposals. How much so? Let's take an example of someone with an annual salary of \$50,000.00, which under the 2006 GS table would be a GS 9, step 5. [Editor's note: Since most EPA NTEU bargaining unit employees are at the 13, 14, and 15 pay grade, the example, which comes from NTEU National, actual understates the real money difference for higher GS grade employees.]

Under the Administration's pay proposals there would have been a 3.6% increase in 2002, a 2.6% increase in 2003, a 2.0% increase in 2004, a 1.5% increase in 2005, and a 2.3% increase in 2006. For someone with a \$50,000 salary in 2001, over these five years, the administration's proposals would have paid out a five year total of \$270,469.

In contrast, because of the efforts of NTEU, the actual pay increases are as follows: a 4.6% increase in 2002, a 4.1% increase in 2003, a 4.1% increase in 2004, a 3.5% increase in 2005, and a 3.1% increase in 2006. For someone with a \$50,000 salary in 2001, NTEU's work led to pay over that same period of \$282,559. That's a difference of \$12,090 in real money. This is but one example of your union working for you. It's your union – NTEU – doing it for you.

April 26, 2006 Statement of NTEU President Colleen M. Kelley On the Need for Military-Civilian Pay Parity in 2007

I am pleased to see the action of the House Armed Services Committee in calling for a 2007 pay raise of 2.7 percent for members of the military—higher than the 2.2 percent proposed by the administration. When the president's budget proposal was unveiled earlier this year, NTEU noted that a 2.2 percent raise would fail to keep pace with inflation—and that an increase of that size effectively minimizes the contributions of those who serve the public, whether as members of the military or as part of the federal civilian workforce. A larger increase for military families

clearly is in order. So too, however, is a larger increase for the men and women of the government's civilian workforce.

Their proposed 2007 raise, also slated at 2.2 percent, should be raised in line with the House Armed Services Committee action. That would reflect the growing bipartisan congressional understanding of the need for military-civilian pay parity. That support is evidenced, among other ways, by a January letter to the president from Washington-area House members, each of whom has been a strong supporter of a fair and equitable pay raise for both those in the military and the civilian workforce. Each of the signers of that letter, organized by Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-MD), represents a large number of federal workers. Each knows the importance of pay parity. Each strongly supports that traditional concept. NTEU will work for continuation of this important principle that serves the nation so well by enhancing and supporting federal agency recruiting and retention efforts.

NTEU National President Kelley Critical of OMB Contracting Report Opposition To Taking Outsourced Work Back into Federal Hands

According to NTEU National, the latest report by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) on federal contracting shows the administration's competitive sourcing program to be little more than a politically-driven initiative designed to turn over as much government work as possible to the private sector.

"If, as the administration claims, its intent is to provide the public with services in an effective, efficient manner at the lowest reasonable cost, then OMB should be supportive of all means of competition for federal work—including in-sourcing," said President Colleen M. Kelley of the National Treasury Employees Union.

"Yet, the OMB report discounts the idea of bringing back into the hands of federal employees work previously contracted out to the private sector even when federal workers can identify efficiencies and quality improvements that can be generated by in-sourcing," Kelley added.

Kelley said the OMB report to Congress on federal contracting—its third—is disappointing in a number of other respects, as well. One of these, she said, is OMB's "continuing practice" of using unsupported estimates and projections of potential savings from contracting rather than trying to find and report actual savings, if any, from the practice.

She noted that the report contains an extensive discussion about validating the work of the employee-based organization put together to generate the in-house bid for the work—but no meaningful attention is paid to validating the contractor's work.

Another failing in the report is its bow to contractor complaints that having to provide health benefits—either comparable to those in the federal sector or any such benefits at all—has the effect of limiting private sector bids.

“That appears to me,” President Kelley said, “to be an admission that contractors save money on their bids by denying their employees health care. And that can’t be a direction that makes any sense for the country.”

As the largest independent federal union, NTEU represents some 150,000 federal workers in 30 agencies and departments.

FROM THE PRESIDENT Dwight Welch

Union President-Labor Relations Director Hold Peace Conference

Stalled Negotiations Get Rolling Again

In past issues of Inside the Fishbowl I openly questioned the state of Labor Relations here at Headquarters. The conundrum—Was Luis Luna talking partnership, but then ordering his subordinates to come down hard on the unions or was someone lower in the chain subverting the concept of partnership? The new Labor Relations Director, Ruben Moreno, was coming down really hard on the Unions, and I wasn’t the only President complaining, though perhaps the most outspoken in that regard. Well the answer has revealed itself and it seems, Luis Luna is what and who he says he is. He is committed to partnership. Here’s what happened.

Following the story in Inside the Fishbowl, long time Union partner Rich Lemley said to himself, “Wait, I’ve known Dwight for a long time and I know he’s a reasonable guy. I also know Ruben Moreno and know that he’s a reasonable guy. These two shouldn’t be fighting.” So Rich arranged a peace conference between Ruben and me.

We closed the door and sat down and had a real heart to heart discussion. Well it seems that somewhere between Luis and Ruben, someone in the chain was not providing Ruben with any guidance as to how to play the game. In Ruben’s last agency, labor relations were played on a more traditional basis and so that’s the way he played it. During the course of things, Mr. Moreno realized that is not the current culture at EPA and has since adjusted accordingly. Ruben and I agreed that Interest Based Bargaining, Partnership and honesty were the way to go. So far a bit boring to the average employee. But the end result has far more impact on employee life.

During the course of our talk, I told Ruben of several negotiations which have been at impasse; some for years. By reassigning negotiations from Melissa Hatfield who can’t seem to get to “Yes” to those who can, Dave Mick and Marcelle Castillo, the log-jam has been broken.

The first of these agreements is the Flexitour agreement. I sent this agreement out to all bargaining unit employees after a 24 hour review by the Executive Board. This agreement will make everyone’s lives a little easier by being able to balance personal obligations and needs with one’s work obligations. Full credit for this negotiation goes to Vice President Linda Barr who gently, but firmly persisted for almost three years to get this done.

A second agreement is the Potomac Yards Move Agreement. A problem with the agreement is that negotiations came too late and much of what is going to be at the Potomac Yards site was

already in place. Nonetheless, our Union was able to gain some concessions. For instance in transportation, a bus will run from 5:30 AM to 7:30 PM instead of the original couple of hours in the morning and couple of hours in the afternoon, with the last bus running at 6:00 PM. The bus will run on natural gas, be run by Metrobus, and all you need to do to ride for free is show your ID. The bus will stop at both the subway and the VRE station and will loop every 6 or 7 minutes.

We tried negotiating to give parking preference to car-pools. The Agency was agreeable, Colonial Parking was not. But we are assured that everyone at Potomac Yards who wants parking will get it.

On a daycare center, an Agency survey indicated insufficient interest, however, the Union has added a clause that at the Union's request the Agency will reassess every two years. If interest increases sufficiently to make a daycare center worthwhile, we may yet get it.

We also included a number of health and safety considerations. More details when the agreement comes out. I would like to acknowledge the work of Vice President Linda Barr, Senior Vice President Seth Low, Vice President Freshteh Toghrol and stewards Jim Goodyear and Bill Evans for their contributions to this agreement.

The other two agreements are PARS and a backfill agreement. The backfill agreement concerns the process used to pick offices/cubes as vacancies occur. It will take the choice away from management and give it over to a democratic employee process similar to the Generic Move Agreement. The current Generic Move Agreement does not kick in if 4 or less employees are moving. I can't discuss the progress and the issues since these are outstanding negotiations and revealing the inner workings of negotiations would be in bad faith on my part.

I would also like to acknowledge the tremendous support we have had from NTEU National. Our Labor Relations representative William (Will) Igoe and our National Negotiator Richard (Rick) Bialczyk are simply the best we have ever had.

Anyway, Ruben Moreno—really good guy. He's getting things done. We are working together like an LR Director and Union President should be working. We call and write each other frequently, discuss the issues in an interest-based manner, and then we get the job done. All he needs now is more staff and I hear that's on the way.

A Tribute to Mike Ryan

Many of us were saddened when we received the all employee memo that Deputy CFO Mike Ryan is leaving EPA for another position elsewhere. EPA's loss is Millennium Challenge Corporation's gain. While it may seem that I think quite opposite, I believe EPA has a good many fine managers. Mike Ryan, however, is as good as they get.

Employee confidentiality precludes me from getting into the detail I might like to get, so I must stick to at least some generalities. "Compassionate," "fair," "problem solver," and "nice guy" are all terms that immediately spring to mind. While we union folks are often pushy and often won't settle for "No" or "It can't be done," if Mike Ryan said "It can't be done," his credibility is such,

that if he said it couldn't be done, or no, then it really couldn't be done. His word was that solid. But most times, it could be done and Mike could do it. In grievances heard before Mike, the employees were treated fairly, more than fairly. Mike turned the People Minus and payroll messes into something we could live with. Payroll problems referred to Mike always got resolved promptly. Mike had a good staff and you could tell they all had the highest regard and respect for him.

Mike's amiable personality and people skills are, by themselves, much to rave about. But what really impressed me most about Mike was the strength of his character and a level of courage exhibited by precious few in federal service. In one case, I cannot talk about, Mike stood with me to the highest echelons of management, when few others would. It takes a very special person to stand up for a righteous, but unpopular cause; one for which there was no chance of success, but stand up he did.

One case I can talk about is that of Linda Barr and a couple of her colleagues, back when they worked in OCFO. These employees were the victims of a hostile work environment. They grieved. Steps one and two, we got the thumbs down. Step three was to Mike Ryan. Mike investigated the facts honestly and objectively. Indeed, Mike set the bar so high, he set the Gold Standard for fairness and objectivity. With most grievances, especially when they get to Step 3, there is usually some compromise on either side. Management gives some, the employee(s) give some. But this decision was a clear and complete victory for the employees. And while we don't know what happened on the other end, we never had a problem from that part of OCFO since.

Now I'd like to pat myself and Chief Steward, Rosezella Canty-Letsome on the back for this win. While Rosezella and I presented a very good case, the true credit goes to Mike Ryan. His integrity, honesty, and compassion are almost without peer.

I will miss Mike Ryan a whole lot, however, I am happy for him that he made his escape. Over the years, I've also worked with other members of his staff and it would seem, and I hope, Mike's magic has rubbed off on them and we will continue to have a good relationship with OCFO.

You Gain Some, You Lose Some

In a previous issue, I reported on the eminent departure of Dave O'Connor, Deputy Assistant Administrator for OARM. Along with Mike Ryan, Dave O'Connor was among the best. Both Mike and Dave, leaving within a few days of one another, were instrumental in creating an environment in which the Unions can operate openly and without fear, to try to make work-life the best it can be for employees. EPA's loss of these two fine gentlemen makes EPA all the poorer.

Good ones may go, but good ones also come in. I am personally excited by the addition of OARM Assistant Administrator Luis Luna and Labor Relations Director Ruben Moreno. OK, so it took a little while to break each of them in. However, the Union has never had the access it has with an AA of OARM as it has with Luis Luna. And Ruben Moreno shows some great promise.

While many report that employee morale is at a low, there are some reasons to smile, some reasons to hope for a better future.

OARM Assistant Administrator Luis Luna Meets with NTEU Chapter 280 Executive Board

On April 11, 2006, OARM AA Luis Luna met with the NTEU Chapter 280 Executive Board. It is the first time Mr. Luna met with the E.B. since Mr. Stephen Johnson became Administrator and Mr. Luna was a part of that meeting. Among the issues discussed were the state of Labor Relations, PARS, Scientific Integrity, resuming the HQ Partnership Council, Smart Card Negotiations, the Libraries, more than one redundancy in data bases, and remote access from home, particularly in the event of a pandemic.

Coming here all the way from the lab in Laurel, the first one out of the chute was Vice President Freshteh Toghrol. Freshteh's issues were that we should have additional copies of our data bases, not just one at Cincinnati. That employees should be given the software to be able to work from remote sites. That these issues would be particularly useful in the event of a pandemic or some other national emergency. Luis readily agreed.

I indicated that the state of Labor Relations had improved markedly after the peace conference between Ruben Moreno and he. I indicated that the terms of the Smart Card (what information should be present on the card) be negotiated.

All of us had complaints and issues regarding PARS based upon input from employees. The importance of Scientific Integrity was discussed by Bill Hirzy and others.

Near the end I asked about the possibility of resuming the Headquarters Partnership Council. Luis indicated that he would reinvigorate the HPC and promised he would meet with the Executive Board on a quarterly basis.

NTEU Chapter 280 President Unanimously Elected as Co-Chair of the National Partnership Council

The co-chairs of the NPC are Assistant Administrator Luis Luna and a Union officer. The co-chairmanship rotates each year between EPA's 5 national unions. The coming year was supposed to be taken by NAGE, however, Narragansett Lab President Leslie Mills is finishing up her PhD. She decided to pass it to the next union which would be NTEU. The four NTEU Presidents have unanimously elected me to co-chair the National Partnership Council. The next meeting is on June 13, 2006 which will be co-chaired by Mark Coryell of AFGE, Ann Arbor. Following that meeting, presuming ratification by the other Presidents, I will be installed as co-chair. Since our election is supposed to take place on the week of June 20, and since our Chapter Constitution does not allow a President to succeed his or herself, no longer being President, I will have more time to devote to this extra duty.