

AFGE: LIFTING US HIGHER



For nearly two centuries, government employees have organized into labor unions to fight for dignity, respect, and an improved standard of living for working families. The White House, Congress, Office of Personnel Management, and our government agencies have never “given” government employees improved working conditions without a fight.

From 1830 to 1862, Navy shipyard workers and government printers mobilized and waged strikes against their employers to shorten the work day for unionized federal workers from 12-14 hours to 10 hours and finally 8 hours. These early federal workers fought for comparable pay and for the establishment of the U.S. Civil Service Commission. In 1912, Congress enacted a law which officially recognized the right of federal workers to organize but banned federal worker strikes. In 1917, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) granted a charter to a newly formed government employees union, the forerunner of the AFGE. Between 1918 and 1931, government employee unions won gains in collective bargaining rights for unionized government printers, limits on Sunday work hours, and the passage of the first federal retirement law. In 1932, government workers reorganized themselves into the American Federation of Government Employees.

For the past 70 years, AFGE has been in the forefront of government employees’ struggles for a living wage, paid health care and retirement, union rights, fair treatment, child care and education subsidies, flexible work schedules and political freedoms.

Take pride in our AFGE history and take part in making AFGE history today.

1932 - 1952

- ★ AFGE is chartered on August 18, 1932.
- ★ AFGE fights for the Thomas Amendment which establishes a 40-hour work week for wage board employees with overtime after 40 hours.
- ★ Congress passes the Wagner Act which gives private sector workers the right to organize and bargain collectively, and in 1935 to engage in collective actions, including strikes, in support of these rights.
- ★ AFGE fights for sick leave and 26 days of annual leave for government workers.
- ★ AFGE membership grows to 25,000 in 1937.
- ★ AFGE fights to extend civil service status to 130,000 government employees bringing retirement rights to most federal workers.
- ★ In 1939, Congress passes the Hatch Act, severely limiting government workers’ political activities and campaigning.
- ★ AFGE succeeds in reducing age limits for optional retirement.
- ★ AFL and AFGE advocate a 35-hour work week for government employees with a minimum annual wage of \$1,500.
- ★ AFGE membership grows to 28,000 in 1941.
- ★ Government freezes employee wages during WWII while private sector wages increase. By end of war, pay gap between private and government sector workers is 15%.
- ★ In 1945, AFGE successfully lobbies for Federal Employees Pay Act, which increases classified salaries by 15.9% and provides payment for overtime, night and holiday work.
- ★ In 1947, Taft-Hartley Act amends Wagner Act and bans public employee strikes.
- ★ AFGE secures 11% pay increase for government workers.
- ★ President Truman signs HR6454, which permits 20-year retirement for certain officers and employees who do hazardous work, including prison guards.

1952 - 1972

- ★ AFGE membership grows to 61,000 in 1952.
- ★ AFL and Congress of Industrial Organizations merge into the AFL-CIO in 1955.
- ★ AFGE and the AFL-CIO fight to overhaul government retirement laws, providing retirement at 55 years of age with 30 years of service. Assures nearly all government employees of a 20% increase in their basic retirement annuity.
- ★ In 1956, Government Printing Office (GPO) craft employees are the first group of federal workers to be granted a shorter work week without reduction of pay. This brings pay and hours in line with private print shop workers.
- ★ AFGE secures enactment of Health Benefits Act authorizing federal government to pay part of health insurance plans.
- ★ In 1959, AFGE wins fight to end inequities in granting holidays to government employees – provides eight paid holidays a year regardless of work schedule or day of week in which holiday falls.
- ★ AFGE membership grows to 83,000 in 1961.
- ★ In 1962, AFGE fights for President Kennedy’s EO10988 which establishes exclusive recognition and bargaining rights to unions in the federal government. Membership jumps 159%.
- ★ Federal Salary Reform Act increases salaries and establishes a new principle of comparability between government and private industry wages. Includes 8-hour overtime law for wage board workers.
- ★ AFGE President John F. Griner is first AFGE leader to sit on the AFL-CIO Executive Council.
- ★ AFGE establishes a Civil Rights Department with Ray Gray as the Director.

1972 - 1982

- ★ AFGE successfully lobbies for the Wage Grade Act, which gives government blue-collar workers representation in wage setting-decisions. Congress passes Federal Pay Comparability Act which gives government worker unions representation on bodies monitoring the data and decision making used to set annual pay adjustments for comparability.
- ★ President Nixon issues EO11491, which establishes formal collective bargaining in federal government.
- ★ In 1974, the AFGE Convention votes to create a Women's Department to advance women's leadership roles in the union. Louise Smothers is appointed first director.
- ★ AFGE fights for employee protections in the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, including the Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA), the Merit Systems Protections Board (MSPB) to protect whistleblowers, and extending the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) coverage to government workers.
- ★ In 1979, AFGE spearheads effort to create collective bargaining for D.C. workers, which includes bargaining for pay and benefits.
- ★ In 1980, AFGE Convention votes to make the Women's Department Director a member of the NEC
- ★ Over 6,000 AFGE members march along with half a million other labor union members on Solidarity Day 1981.
- ★ In 1981, President Reagan fires air traffic controllers in Air Traffic Controllers Strike. Professional Air Traffic Controllers Association (PATCO) leaders are jailed as Reagan declares war on government workers.
- ★ In 1982, AFGE signs its first national agreements with Social Security Administration (SSA) covering 60,000 SSA employees and the Department of Veterans' Administration (DVA), covering 125,000 DVA employees.
- ★ Barbara R. Hutchinson, AFGE Women's Department Director, is named a Vice President of the AFL-CIO in 1982.

1982 - 1992

- ★ AFGE launches campaign to clean up federal prisons after several AFGE prison guards are killed and assaulted.
- ★ AFGE establishes the Legislative Action Fund (LAF) to spur grassroots political action in AFGE locals.
- ★ In 1985, AFGE wins \$3.75 million class action suit against Warner Robins on behalf of thousands of African-American workers discriminated against in hiring and promotions. Two hundred and forty members of the class receive promotions.
- ★ AFGE kicks off national media campaign, "Dedicated Americans Keeping Our Country Strong," to stress the important role of government in improving the quality of life for all Americans.
- ★ AFGE helps save government retirement benefits through the creation of the Federal Employees Retirement System in 1986.
- ★ In 1986, President Reagan issues EO requiring random drug testing of government workers. AFGE defeats initiative through its "Don't Piss on Me" campaign.
- ★ AFGE launches "Lunch and Learn" program for government workers to talk with union organizers.
- ★ Four thousand AFGE activists come to Washington, DC in 1986 to draw up a "Government Employee Bill of Rights" as part of the union's "Unity is Power" campaign.
- ★ AFGE argues successfully in Supreme Court against an unconstitutional law banning government workers from receiving income from speaking or writing off duty about matters unrelated to their jobs.
- ★ Gram-Rudman-Hollings balanced budget law passes in 1986. Law immediately rescinds Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs) for government workers and threatens jobs.
- ★ In 1987, President Reagan proposes eliminating 20,000 government jobs. General Services Administration (GSA) seeks to contract out work to meet its staffing cuts.
- ★ AFGE wins first preliminary injunction against government employee drug testing at Fort Stewart, Georgia.
- ★ U.S. Court of Appeals agrees with AFGE that Hatch Act cannot be used to restrict public speech of government employees unless there is a connection between the statement and a political candidate or activity.
- ★ AFGE conducts "Quality of Public Service Survey" to SSA workers nationwide regarding the effects of working conditions on public service. Eighty percent cite staffing shortages as the primary cause of excessive back logs and poor customer service.
- ★ In 1990, AFGE's NEC establishes a Health and Safety Committee to monitor workplace problems and work toward legislation providing full OSHA coverage for government employees.
- ★ AFGE negotiates a joint labor management project with McClellan Air Force Base, making AFGE an equal partner with management in determining productivity, compensation and quality of work life. *[This work lays the groundwork for the Federal Employees Pay Comparability Act (FEPCA).]*
- ★ In 1991, President Bush signs FEPCA, establishing locality pay to gradually close the 30 % pay gap between government and private sectors. President Clinton subsequently rejects the bill's pay formula and refuses to follow mandates of FEPCA.
- ★ AFGE helps draft legislation to amend the 1991 Civil Rights Act, which, for the first time, brings the right of jury trial, as well as compensatory damages, to government employees who fall victim to unlawful discrimination.
- ★ Congress passes AFGE-backed provisions in the Defense Authorization Bill to aid Department of Defense (DoD) workers facing job cuts. Final measure includes employee buyout payments of up to \$25,000, continued health care coverage, minimum 60-day Reduction in Force (RIF) notice and job training.
- ★ AFGE holds its first Firefighter Seminar focusing on firefighter employment issues for both firefighters and chiefs. AFGE Firefighter Manuals become the standard practice guides for firefighters, chiefs, and human resource and labor relations specialists.



- ★ AFGE plays key role in “Reinventing Government” initiative by recommending labor management partnerships with executive branch employees. In 1993, President Clinton signs EO12871 creating the National Partnership Council with four labor members and representatives from each cabinet department.
- ★ In 1993, Hatch Act Reform provides government workers many of the same rights as other Americans to participate in political activities. AFGE-PAC now qualifies for automatic Political Action Committee (PAC) donation check-off by employees, significantly increasing union’s power to support pro-worker candidates.
- ★ AFGE membership grows to 171,000 in 1994.
- ★ AFGE and Veterans Benefits Administration enter into settlement agreement in which employees in 15 positions are awarded over \$15 million in back pay.
- ★ AFGE launches Metropolitan Empowerment Initiatives (METROs) to develop membership drives in areas where government agencies and workers are highly concentrated. Campaign yields 10,000 new members by 1996.
- ★ AFGE holds its first Human Rights Conference.
- ★ 1995 bombing of Oklahoma City Federal Building kills 168 people, including scores of AFGE members. AFGE sets up the “Fund for Emergency Disaster Support, Inc.” (FEDS), to bring relief to government workers hit by natural or man-made disasters. AFGE begins immediate campaign to improve security in government installations.
- ★ In 1995, 800,000 federal workers are locked out, losing over 50 days of work, as the result of congressional budget battles over cuts in retirement and health benefits government workers. AFGE sets up hotline to help members. AFGE prepares Government Lockout Handbook to aid its members during the government shutdown and goes to court to challenge the lockout’s impact on employees.
- ★ Anti-union Senators Thurmond and Faircloth and Representative Bunning sponsor bills to take away or seriously limit “official time” rights in government agencies.
- ★ AFGE membership grows to 176,000 in 1996.
- ★ In 1997, AFGE’s agreement with Hughes Aircraft prohibits contracting, for the first time, and includes “successor” clause to ensure union recognition by a new owner.
- ★ www.afge.org debuts on the web in 1997.
- ★ In 1997, AFGE wins a \$30 million recovery in lost overtime pay at for SSA workers – the largest Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) win in the federal sector.
- ★ Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) field office employers reorganize into a nationwide bargaining unit with AFGE Local 1923 doubling its membership.
- ★ AFGE issues “white paper” on state of labor relations within the BoP, citing 14 examples of alleged management abuse of the disciplinary process. NEC initiates a joint Prisons Council Task Force to revitalize partnership activities and improve working conditions and labor management relations in the BoP.
- ★ In 1998, AFGE defeats wholesale privatization of DoD. AFGE defeats contractor backed “Freedom from Government Competition Act” and replaces it with the Federal Activities Inventory Review Act (FAIR) (A-76) which codifies existing government regulations.
- ★ AFGE wins decade-long pay fight for government firefighters. 10,000 firefighters receive a 10% pay adjustment in addition to their regular pay increase.
- ★ D.C. Control Board voids labor agreement with D.C. employees. AFGE files successful lawsuit restoring back pay and collective bargaining rights to D.C. government employees. New contract increases pay and bargaining protections.
- ★ AFGE successfully pushes for pilot program in 1998 to provide child care subsidies for low-wage government workers. Negotiates agreements at DOL, OPM, and GSA which provide up to a 30% child care subsidy to eligible employees.
- ★ Union membership grows to 186,000 in 1998.
- ★ AFGE holds second seminar on firefighter employment issues. Congress passes AFGE-drafted Firefighter Pay Bill, creating fair method for calculating firefighter pay.
- ★ In 1999, AFGE derails proposals to privatize Social Security. Launches grassroots campaign, Stop Wasting America’s Money on Privatization (SWAMP), to urge Congress to suspend further government contracting until true costs of privatization are assessed.
- ★ AFGE pushes President Clinton to expand the use of sick leave for government employees who need to care for seriously ill family members.
- ★ AFGE reaches agreement with GSA to cancel its decision to close its eight remaining federal supply warehouses saving jobs for 2000 GSA workers.
- ★ AFGE organizes 6,000 new members during 40 METROs. Holds its first Organizing Institute. Membership reaches over 190,000 in 1999.
- ★ In 1999, AFGE wins three U.S. Supreme Court cases which: (1) enables Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to order government agencies to pay compensatory damages in discrimination cases; (2) wins the right for government workers to have a union representative present during questioning by the OIG; and (3) upholds AFGE’s right to initiate mid-term bargaining.
- ★ AFGE campaigns for legislation naming the Smithsonian a federal agency covered by both labor and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) laws after a negative ruling by the Supreme Court that the Smithsonian was not a federal agency.
- ★ AFGE holds its first blue collar pay conference to plan long term strategies to improve blue collar pay for government employees. “Vision 1999 Conference” is convened to design AFGE’s organizing growth strategy. Planning conference for AFGE professionals is also held. Nearly 2000 DVA professionals join AFGE.
- ★ In 1999, AFGE files lawsuit in U.S. District Court to order USDA to use federal inspectors, not industry representatives, to conduct meat and poultry inspections.
- ★ AFGE’s grassroots campaign forces Congress and the President to provide biggest pay raise to government employees since 1980.
- ★ AFGE successfully fights to retain employee benefits for paid eye exam and eyeglasses in Master Agreement with SSA.
- ★ In 2000, AFGE lobbies Congress to take away the discretion of DVA Medical Directors to deny nurses an annual pay raise affecting 125,000 DVA employees nationwide. Legislation guarantees that DVA nurses and other health care workers receive the same increase GS workers receive, plus locality pay.
- ★ Hundreds of AFGE members participate in creation of an AFGE memorial quilt honoring AFGE members who lost their lives in the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing.
- ★ Membership grows to nearly 200,000 in 2000. Five additional professional units are added to AFGE’s DVA unit.
- ★ In 2000, the AFGE-supported Truthfulness, Responsibility and Accountability in Contracting (TRAC) Act is introduced in Congress and in the D.C. government. TRAC would grant government employee unions the right to a GAO and/or judicial review of A-76 awards. Over 200,000 SWAMP-grams are delivered to Congress and over 2,000 AFGE members rally on Capitol Hill in support of TRAC.
- ★ At DoD, AFGE establishes the most systematic Congressional reporting requirements for contracting and downsizing of any government agency. AFGE blocks privatization attempt of government owned Hydroelectric Power Plant at Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan.
- ★ In 2000, SSA/FLSA recovery grows to over \$152 million for over forty-five thousand AFGE bargaining unit members—the largest FLSA recovery ever.
- ★ Groundbreaking child care subsidy language is enacted for a second year. Participating families get as much \$6,300 a year to defray child care costs.
- ★ U.S. Court of Appeals rules in favor of AFGE’s 5300 federal food inspectors stating that the law requires food inspections to be conducted by federal inspectors, not private industry representatives.
- ★ AFGE files lawsuit against the Air Force for violations of FAIR and A-76 in an effort to set a precedent for employees to challenge adverse A-76 determinations. Several other lawsuits are filed challenging irregularities in government contracting. Courts rule that AFGE does not have “standing” to sue government agencies for A-76 violations. AFGE mobilizes to ensure TRAC legislation guarantees this right.
- ★ In 2000, AFGE wins \$1 million settlement against the D.C. Financial Control Board in its challenge of a legislatively imposed pay cut.
- ★ Agencies required, for first time, to report formally on their progress in opening up the decision making process to union workers. In 2000, Partnership awards are named after former AFGE President John N. Sturdivant.
- ★ President Clinton directs DHSS and GSA to develop guidelines on the use of Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) in government buildings to prevent deaths of workers by cardiac arrest. AFGE pushes for training on use of AEDs.
- ★ GAO report on Competitive Contracting adopts AFGE position that contractors should be held to the same scrutiny as government employees.
- ★ In 2000, AFGE and Veterans Benefits Administration enter into settlement agreement for Computer Specialists for \$1 million in back pay. Prison employees receive \$120 million in back pay in historic AFGE and BoP settlement.
- ★ AFGE files suit against DoD and Redstone Arsenal for its failure to follow DoD regulations requiring it to adequately provide sufficient fire departments and staff to protect all employees on the installation.
- ★ In 2001, after a 10 year struggle, OSHA issues ergonomics standards. Bush Administration repeals standard in March.
- ★ In 2001, President Bush revokes the National Partnership Council.
- ★ AFGE wins Saturday premium pay for DVA health care workers. Law requires DVA to establish safe staffing levels and improve retirement benefits for DVA nurses.
- ★ In 2001, AFGE negotiates permanent child care subsidies for low income government employees. 15 federal agencies participate.
- ★ On September 11, 2001, over 3,000 men and women, nearly one-third who are union members, lose their lives in attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center. Six AFGE Locals are directly affected by the attacks. Nearly 10,000 union workers lose their jobs as a result of the tragedy.
- ★ AFGE plays leading role in the airport security debate, and wins fight to have airport screening performed by experienced government employees in the newly formed Transportation Security Administration (TSA).
- ★ AFGE leads national effort to fight prison privatization through involvement in the Public Safety and Justice Campaign. GAO and other studies show private prisons fail to save money for taxpayers.
- ★ AFGE fights to overturn EO requiring contractors to post notices that people in the private sector don’t have to join a union. Bush issues a second EO to eliminate requirement that workers on government projects receive union negotiated wages.
- ★ President Bush issues EO13252 that denies union representation to more than 1,000 DoJ employees due to national security concerns. EO is issued on the same day the FLRA holds hearing on a DoJ employees’ petition for union representation.
- ★ NEC votes to organize the 40,000 employees of the newly formed TSA.
- ★ President Bush announces plans to consolidate 22 federal agencies into the Homeland Security Department. Proposal would strip away federal workers union and civil service rights. AFGE launches political action and media campaign, “Our Best Homeland Security – Federal Employees,” to preserve job protections.
- ★ AFGE successfully lobbies Congress to reject President’s Bush 2.6% pay proposal for government employees and pass a for 4.1% increase effective 2003.
- ★ AFGE conducts third firefighters seminar. Issues revised Firefighters Issues Manual.
- ★ AFGE wins \$75,000 in back pay for government employees at the National Cemetery Administration.
- ★ AFGE active membership reaches 200,000 in 2002.
- ★ In 2002, AFGE celebrates 70th anniversary. Holds National Leadership Meeting to set strategic goals in organizing, legislation and political action, representation, communications, and leadership development.