



## *Firebird 24*

*Reborn From Our Ashes*

*NTEU Chapter 24 Newsletter*

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**Volume 15**

**\*\*\*Member Edition\*\*\***

**September 2008**

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# Colleen Kelley

## To Attend Membership Meeting

Chapter 24 will be holding a general membership meeting October 22, 2008, at Sinbad's Restaurant & Marina, 100 St. Clair, Detroit. NTEU National President Colleen M. Kelley will address the membership, and time permitting, will later answer members' questions.

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**The President's View**  
**-Colleen Kelley**

### **Public Service Announcement**

In the next few months every NTEU member should keep on eye on the TV and an ear to the radio so you will not miss the playing of NTEU's new public service campaign. This summer we are rolling out our new nationwide campaign to educate the American public on the important work you do each day.

I have been deeply disturbed over the years at the attacks politicians and business leaders level at federal employees simply to gain a sound bite. Bureaucrat has become a bad word. Citizens, especially during an election year, face a constant barrage of negative messages about public servants.

This public service campaign will spread a different message. Our goal is to put an actual face on federal employees and show the American

public how the work you do touches their lives each and every day. We want to change the image of federal workers from the false negative picture that many carry around to the actual picture—the one I know to be true—of caring and dedicated people called to public service.

Here is how we intend to do that. Many radio and TV stations are required to air, for free, a certain number of messages designed to educate the public. These broadcasting outlets choose from the many public service messages organizations send to them. We are hopeful that our public service announcement (PSA) will strike a chord with the public service directors and be aired in cities across the country. Our PSA features real federal employees talking about the important work they do from securing our borders to protecting our air, water and food and drug supplies.

NTEU is distributing our PSA to hundreds of TV and radio stations and soliciting the interest of hundreds more. NTEU chapters are getting involved using PSA kits we are providing that will help them reach out to their local TV and radio stations.

I am proud that NTEU has developed and initiated this campaign. We are the only federal union with a national campaign aimed at presenting a positive image of federal employees. We are

the only federal union with an organized effort to showcase your daily roles in providing critical services to the American public. Americans know far too little about what you do, yet their lives are touched by federal employees every day.

Our mission as a union is to represent employees in multiple ways. Our work does not stop at the agency door, or once we step off Capitol Hill, or outside a courtroom. NTEU is committed to representing employees with the general public. America should be proud of the caliber of the people in this country who are called to public service. This campaign will help our fellow citizens understand that.

*Quoted from NTEU Bulletin*

## **Making the Right Acquaintances** **-Jessie Dawkins, Steward**



**Debbie Barker** and I met with Representative **Dale Kildee** (see above picture) August 14th. He volunteered his time to meet with us to discuss various issues relating to federal workers. We were greeted with a strong handshake and a hug from the Representative. There were several other people present, and Mr. Kildee was pulled in many directions. It was an honor to sit with him and his assistant, Tiffany. Rep Kildee pledged his unwavering commitment to supporting the federal workers and the middle class, in general.

Debbie and I sat at the table with Lt. Governor **John D. Cherry, Jr.** and his entourage. It was terrific. The Lt. Governor has an outstanding sense of humor and was very receptive to us. It is difficult to express how wonderful it is to be acknowledged by our leaders at that level. It is clear that they are aware of the plight of the middle class and working poor. There is no doubt in my mind that they are fighting for federal workers.

We had an extensive meeting with the Downtown Development Authority. At one point, we

had a phone conference with members who were unable to attend. It was made clear that no promises were made, but there is a continuing effort to relocate the Flint POD in the downtown area. Property is being secured as of this writing.



**Debbie & Jessie with Lt. Governor Cherry**

## **Impact and Implementation**

**-Jeri Burger, Chapter President**

I was fortunate enough to be part of two national negotiation teams in Washington DC this year. The teams consist of National Negotiators and chapter leaders from around the country. Our role was to bargain the Impact and Implementation of the initiatives proposed by Management. The initiatives I bargained were Cell Phones for Revenue Officers and GPS for Fuel Compliance Officers. So, what does that mean?

Management has rights granted by law and by contract. Some of these rights include: the right to assign work; the right to evaluate employees; the right to issue equipment; and the right to hire, assign, direct, layoff, and retain employees. However, management must negotiate the impact and implementation of virtually any change in working conditions – even if that change is a management right. In other words, management can make a change, but it must first give notice of the change and bargain with NTEU as the exclusive representative of the bargaining unit.

The bargaining process begins when Management provides notice. NTEU would then request a briefing or request to begin negotiations. The Agency submits proposals for how it wants to implement the change; NTEU offers counter proposals. Both sides offer counter proposals until agreement is reached or the parties declare an impasse.

An agreement is written in the form of a Memorandum or Letter of Understanding. The change is implemented per the agreement after the Treasury Department gives final approval. Most of

the agreements are presented by management, with a NTEU representative present, at formal meetings, often referred to as 7114 meetings.

While NTEU cannot stop management from making changes—that is their right—we do the most we can to temper the impact and implementation of any changes proposed by the agency. For example, NTEU makes sure management is proposing to give adequate training, will give you time to become acclimated to a change prior to being evaluated on the change, conducts pilot programs to evaluate the change, etc.

Chapter 24 will be forwarding e-mails titled IRS...Midterm Bargaining Alert. The e-mails normally come out every week and contain the issues that will be bargained during the week. Please let me know if you have any comments or suggestions for the NTEU bargaining team. I will forward them to the appropriate person. Also, let your steward know if you believe Management is attempting to make a change without first bargaining with NTEU.

## Hails from the Chief

**-Karen Johnson, Chief Steward**

This has been an exceptionally busy period for the Union office. We are swamped with work. Since January 1, 2008, our chapter has closed 58 grievances, and we still have 57 issues in process.

In July and August, Chapter 24 stewards have been successful in getting substantial relief in 14 of 16 cases handled by the chapter during this time period. Of the other two cases, a member withdrew from the process; and in the other, the employee admitted to the misconduct charged.

Most significantly, Chapter 24 recently received word that we have won a major victory in arbitration. A member was charged with violating 1203(b) of RRA '98. The case went through the oral reply process and on to arbitration. The arbitrator issued his decision on September 5, 2008, finding that the IRS did not prove any willful intent. He awarded reinstatement with full back pay. He also declared that the union substantially prevailed in the case, which means he determined the Agency must pay 75% of the cost of the arbitration. This is significant alone because the parties usually split the cost unless one party substantially prevails. The Agency does retain a right of appeal not to exceed 30 days.

Congratulations to Stewards **Barry Begeny** and **Orlando Mask** for their efforts in recruiting new members. Kudos's to the following stewards for going the extra mile on behalf of our members: **Brian Norton, Leonard Hanline, Mark Cook,**

**Ella Porter, Henry Morrison, David Hauenstein, Dan Spears, and Greg Wert.** A special note of thanks to our ACS stewards **Acquneese King, Brenda Lowery, and Patricia Buchanan** for their tireless efforts to assist the employees in ACS. I would like to take a moment to remind our members that the stewards working on behalf of NTEU Chapter 24 give their time and expertise willingly, unselfishly, and unconditionally in pursuit of what is fair, right, and just.

## What is the Oral Reply Process?

Okay. So now you're in trouble with the Agency, and they are proposing to issue you a Letter of Reprimand, or even worse, suspend you from duty (without pay, of course) or remove you from Federal Service. The letter advising you of the proposed action informs you of your right to reply orally or in writing. So what now?

First and foremost, immediately go see your steward, and show them the letter. There is a time limit for you to request to respond to the charges. Your steward will walk you through this initial process.

The Oral Reply is the opportunity for you, through your NTEU representative, to answer the Agency's allegations against you, and to present your side of the story. This is done by presenting your side of the story, in addition to citing the National Contract, labor law, arbitration decisions that have bearing, as well as U.S. government, Treasury Department, and IRS rules and regulations.

Your part in the process will typically be the following: You will be interviewed by the steward preparing the Oral Reply. Chapter 24 has a core of stewards highly trained in the Oral Reply process. They will get your side of the story, and follow-up with you throughout the process. Then, you will be asked to attend the actual Oral Reply.

The Oral Reply is an informal hearing; there will be the Hearing Official for the Agency, who is typically the same management official who signed the letter of proposed discipline (up to a 14 day suspension) or adverse (more than 14 day suspension, up to removal) action. There will also be a court reporter. The steward presenting the Oral Reply will be there with you. Standard practice is to also have someone from Labor Relations. usually by telephone. The Hearing Official will make an opening statement, and then your steward will present the Oral Reply. This is not an inquiry or examination. The Agency officials are not permitted to ask questions, other than to clarify statements from the Oral Reply.

The Hearing Official then makes a closing statement. And that's it.

The Hearing Official presents the facts to the Deciding Official, who will issue a decision: Denial of the Reply; granting full or partial relief, or a settlement. If a satisfactory decision is not given, NTEU will decide whether to take your case to arbitration.

The original letter also offers you the opportunity of a written reply instead of an oral reply. Chapter 24 prefers oral replies because in doing so, we at least know that the Hearing Official hears our argument; we can't be as certain that they actually read a written reply.

### THE MORE THINGS CHANGE...THE MORE THEY STAY THE SAME

**-Karen Johnson, Chief Steward**

It is unbelievable how quickly my first year as Chief Steward has flown by. As **Jeri Burger**, our Chapter President, and I continue to honor our number one commitment of service to our members, I would like to thank each of you for your membership in NTEU. You have heard us comment in both verbal and printed format that there can be no UNION without "U". One consistent issue we have heard from members throughout the year involves having a steward assigned to best represent their particular need. Some of you may recall **Mary Cook's** article back in Volume Four of the Firebird. Here is an excerpt:

*There is an issue in your work life. Perhaps it is a concern regarding a number on your annual appraisal, perhaps TIGTA has called you for an interview, or perhaps there is an issue regarding annual leave, and you are not comfortable discussing the matter with the steward in your work area. The steward might be too close to the problem, or there is a personality conflict, or maybe they are just on leave. What should you do?*

*NTEU Chapter 24 has a cadre of capable stewards...at your disposal. While your assigned steward is usually the best person to handle your problem, we are all trained, and ready to assist and guide you. Don't let a problem go unaddressed because you can't discuss it with your steward. Call the Chapter 24 office at (313) 628-3652, and get referred to another steward. Solidarity crosses POD and division boundaries. Get the help you need.*

I would like to remind all our members of Mary's suggestion. Please do not let a problem fester or go unresolved because you don't feel comfortable bringing it to the attention of the steward assigned to your work area. Call the chapter office at (313) 628-3652, or call me at (313) 628-3562. We will make arrangements to have a steward assigned to work with you to resolve the problem. Solidarity is a basic tenet of unionism. Chapter 24 can and will assist you in getting the help you need.

## Steward in the Spotlight?



## WHO AM I?

I am a native Detroiter who has dedicated 24 years to the Government. I worked 10 years in Taxpayer Service, 8.5 years as a tax auditor, and now I am assigned to SPEC. I have been a steward for NTEU on and off throughout my entire career. Presently, I have been a steward for the last five years. I have been married to the same man for 20 years. I have three children and four grandchildren. I am the proud mother of a pre-med student attending U of D Mercy on a full academic scholarship, and my youngest child has been listed not once, but twice among "Who's Who in America's Middle Schools".

If you think you know me, contact our Editor, David Hauenstein at (248) 874-2210, or [david.b.hauenstein@irs.gov](mailto:david.b.hauenstein@irs.gov). A winner will be chosen from all correct answers, to receive a trinket from NTEU.

## Sound Off!

Got something you want to tell us or others about? Want to express your opinion anonymously? We'd really like to hear from you.

Leave your message at **(313) 628-3864** and we will print reasonable topics. Please speak distinctly and limit your comments to a few sentences.

“...we started [as Revenue Officers in] 1979 ....it seems like an eternity. My biggest regret is that I obviously thought so little of myself that I took this first job that came by and never thought twice about looking anywhere else. I didn't have a clue it would be so draining as it is. Do you realize we could be regular, happy people if we had jobs that were decent/fulfilling...I could have done housekeeping and felt more fulfilled...”

## Hello and Farewell

-Ella Porter



Hello, and soon farewell, to all of my friends, co-workers, and fellow union stewards. I thought I would write a brief note about myself and career with IRS. I joined IRS in February 1978, as a manager in microfilm/controls and remained in that unit until I was selected as a Revenue Officer in October 1978. I worked as a RO in the field until 1982, when I became a coach; coaching, amongst others, **Karen Johnson** and **Verdis Coskrey-Young**. Karen is now our Chief Steward and Verdis has moved on to become the Central Area Collection Policy Analyst. Let me also remember **Frank Poma** as my coach/mentor as a RO. I was a manager from 1983, through 1989. During my tenure as a manager, I was successful in getting many of my co-workers promoted to higher grade levels, plus developing them to be successful after my departure. I stepped down as a manager in January 1989, and became a union steward in the Livonia office. I have enjoyed my

many years as steward: winning grievances and sometimes saving my co-workers their jobs is rewarding. Over the years just being a RO, with so many demands (especially timeframes to do this or that) is overwhelming; it is time for me to let my younger co-workers meet this challenge.

My final date of employment with the Service is 11/28/08. Currently, I just want to spend the month of December acclimating myself to retirement. I will be contacting other retirees so we can have lunch, etc. I will also keep in touch with the many friends I will leave behind. I will miss my friends and especially my lunch buddies, as this is the most important part of the job. I know I cannot stay home and just do nothing. Therefore, I will probably do some volunteer work and maybe earn a few coins.

## Did You Know?

### -Marianne Gordon, Chapter Secretary

For the upcoming elections in November, you must be registered to vote 30 days prior to the election. Also, if you have children or grandchildren who will be 18 years old by Election Day (November 4), they can vote as long as they register 30 days before the election.

And from **Greg Wert**, Steward:

Doctor Manager? Do you have a manager who insists on anyone calling in on sick leave asking an explanation of EXACTLY what's wrong? One manager explained, "I know how long it takes to recover from a root canal." Not only does this violate the Contract, it also violates OPM regulations. An appropriate response to this inquiry should start with a request for the manager's medical degree. Even if a person is on a leave restriction letter, medical details do NOT go to the manager; they go to a certified specialist acting on behalf of Federal Occupational Health. So when an employee is sick and the manager asks, "What's wrong?" the proper response should be, "I'm sick."

# The Automated Collection Page

## Working Conditions in ACS

-Jeri Burger, Chapter President

Chapter 24 filed an Institutional Grievance alleging Unfair Labor Practices that have occurred in ACS. An Institutional Grievance is filed when Management violates the Union's rights. At the same time, Management is also violating employees' rights. Chief Steward **Karen Johnson** and I met with **Renee Mitchell**, Director, Campus Compliance Operations. Specifically, we explained to her what many ACS employees already know: some of the managers in ACS Detroit are rude and un-professional, and Management has engaged in a pattern of denying NTEU Chapter 24 stewards time to provide assistance to members. We also discussed some of the ACS managers' decisions and directives. We received Director Mitchell's response August 8, 2008. I thought you would want to read about the issues and some of her comments.

While she did not expressly concede any specific incidents, Director Mitchell wrote "As I said during our meeting, it is expected that the ACS Managers interact with employees and NTEU in a professional manner at all times. I believe daily interactions can always improve if all parties involved behave professionally." It is a violation of Article 5 of the National Agreement for a manager to treat an employee in an unprofessional manner. See your steward if you have been treated in a rude or unprofessional manner. A grievance can and should be filed.

Both employees and stewards are entitled to administrative/union time to address employee concerns and problems. This right is guaranteed by Articles 5 and 9 of the Contract. Whenever you believe that a discussion you have with Management, or Management's representative, may lead to disciplinary action, you are entitled to have a union representative in the meeting. However, there are some instances where you are not entitled to a union steward, such as performance counseling. If your manager refuses your request for a steward, you should attend the meeting and arrange to speak with your steward afterwards. Your steward can then arrange their time off the phones as well. This way you avoid potential insubordination charges and your steward will be able to advise you based upon what happened at the meeting. A grievance would be appropriate if your steward should have been invited to the meeting.

We also brought up some specific decisions and directions given by some ACS managers:

**Excessive "idle temp" will add up to leave or AWOL.**

**Director Mitchell's answer** included: "If the employee is not working and trying to use overhead programs to disguise the fact they are not working, management should intervene. Converting overhead time to AWOL could be an option management could pursue to correct the situation."

**NTEU's response** – Management cannot compel you to use your leave to balance your time on your 3081. Yes, they have the option to issue AWOL. However, AWOL is grievable and we would grieve this unreasonable practice.

**Managers are instructing their employees that no advanced sick leave can be considered unless and until FMLA (Family Medical Leave Act) is obtained. Employees are instructed that they must disclose a diagnosis or prognosis in order to qualify for advanced sick leave.**

**Director Mitchell's response:** "We agree that advanced sick leave can be granted as long as the employee has met the criteria stated in Article 34, Section 5. One requirement states the employee must have a Serious Disability or Ailment. That would mean the employee would probably have to submit medical documentation to someone. The Diagnosis and Prognosis does not have to be disclosed to management. But Management would have a right to a consultation from FOH [Federal Occupation Health] regarding the condition and if it met the requirement of a Serious Disability or Ailment."

**Employees are being told they must exhaust their annual leave before allowing an opportunity to obtain advanced sick leave.**

**Director Mitchell's reply:** "We agree that an employee does not have to exhaust their annual leave before being allowed to obtain advanced sick leave, but the employee will have to meet the criteria in Article 34, Section 5 before sick leave can be granted."

**NTEU's answer** - We are glad that Director Mitchell confirms the correct procedures regarding advanced sick leave. Now we just wish that all ACS managers have the same understanding. Bottom line, if your manager denies you sick

leave you should consult with your steward. If the manager is not following the National Agreement guidelines you should contact your steward and we will file a grievance on your behalf. Your steward can help you with all aspects of sick leave and FMLA issues. This includes when your manager questions whether or not you are sick! If you are sick, you are sick! That is why you have sick leave and why NTEU negotiated a sick leave article. Managers should not be bullying employees into coming to work when they are sick.

**Employees were told they needed to submit an OPM 71 form in order to get time to speak with a union steward.** (Form used to obtain a leave of absence)

**Director Mitchell's reply:** "I agree that an OPM 71 is not necessary to request administrative leave, jury duty, etc."

**NTEU's response** – We hope that no employees are still being asked to submit this form to use administrative time or leave, especially to consult with their steward. Please let your steward know if your manager is incorrectly requesting you complete this form.

**ACS Management believes that the Customer Service Agreement has expired, including the use of wrap time.**

**Director Mitchell's response:** "Although a new Customer Service Agreement (CSA) is being negotiated, we do not agree that the prior CSA is still in force. Regarding the use of wrap time, employees should follow the direction provided by their manager. If the manager does not feel the time charged is appropriate then it would be appropriate to question the employee."

**NTEU's reply** – Whether the Agency believes the Customer Service Agreement is still in force or not, the Agency cannot change working conditions or past practices without providing notice and the opportunity to bargain. Failure/refusal to do so is a violation of your contractual and statutory rights, and Chapter 24 will not tolerate such a violation.

**ACS Management is resisting NTEU doing desk drops.**

**Director Mitchell's answer:** "Article 11, Section 4D, of the National Agreement discussed [sic] desk drops. NTEU is prohibited from making desk drops while employees are in the team working. Desk drops are to be made so they do not disrupt the team. Article 11 stipulated [sic]

that the employee making the drops needs to be on their own time and it is inappropriate for management to assist with the desk drop.

Employees have access to the DCC 24 hours a day and employees could enter ACS on their own time before or after hours if it is necessary to make a desk drop. I would ask that the Operations Manager, **Regina Owens**, be notified when the desk drops occur to avoid any concerns related to employees coming into the work place before or after hours."

**NTEU's response** – This was a very long response that essentially concedes we were right. NTEU has the right to communicate with its members. We realize that ACS employees are not given sufficient time to review e-mails, so we will continue to do desk drops when appropriate.

**Employees are being denied the opportunity to Administrative time to prepare written rebuttals to evaluative recordation.**

**Director Mitchell's reply:** "I do agree that management will see that employees are afforded their contractual rights"

**NTEU's response** – It goes without saying that employees are entitled to Administrative time to rebut evaluative recordations. This includes EQ reviews, midyear reviews, departure ratings, or any other written or verbal evaluative vehicles. You should contact one of your stewards if your manager denies your right to Administrative time to complete a rebuttal.

We decided not to invoke Arbitration because we made our point to Director Mitchell and wanted to allow her the opportunity to speak to her managers. We will continue to closely monitor the situation in ACS.

We all know the demands of working in ACS. Those demands should not include unreasonable treatment from your manager. NTEU Chapter 24 will continue to fight for your rights. But we need your help. If you believe that you have been denied leave, or time to complete a rebuttal, or unjustly charged AWOL, or that you have been treated in a rude or unprofessional manner, you need to see your steward and stand up for your rights. We will continue to file grievances and do whatever we need to do to improve your working conditions in ACS.

#### **ACS Stewards**

**Patricia Buchanan**

**Brenda Lowery**

**Acquneese King**

**Larry Reynolds**

### Health Insurance in Retirement

#### -Ella Porter, Steward

Many employees nearing retirement are unaware that we must be enrolled in a Federal Employees Health Benefit plan (health insurance) for the five years prior to retirement to be eligible to continue any federal health insurance plan once in retirement. Many employees have relied upon their spouse's health insurance from the private sector, but cutbacks are being made in that arena, creating the need for coverage under FEHB. Employees are encouraged to make sure they are enrolled so not to miss out on coverage, or having to extend the anticipated date of their retirement.

### Lunch and Learn is a Success

#### -Mary Cook, Member of the Board & Assistant Chief Steward-Outstate

On July 10, 2008, fourteen Chapter 24 members from the East Lansing and Jackson posts of duty joined President **Jeri Burger** and Chief Steward **Karen Johnson** for a Lunch and Learn in the East Lansing conference room. We discussed legislative issues, the negotiation process, annual appraisals, cell phones, TIGTA interviews, and much more. The group participated in a lively discussion. A sub sandwich lunch was enjoyed by the participants. Those in attendance agreed it was an informative way to enjoy lunch. Thanks to Jeri and Karen for coming.

Also from Mary...

#### LUNCH & LEARN (NORTHERN STYLE)

On Tuesday, August 26, 2008, NTEU Chapter 24 hosted a Lunch and Learn in the Traverse City Post of Duty. Twelve members were in attendance. A discussion was held about pay comparability, outsourcing, RO cell phones, self evaluations, and a number of other topics. There was much interaction between Chapter officials (Jeri Burger, Karen Johnson, **Thomas Coates**, and myself) and the membership, and all enjoyed delicious deli sandwiches and brownies. Thanks to all attendees and especially RO Kurt Hein for taking care of the food.

On September 8, 2008 the Traverse City POD celebrated Labor Recognition Week early by enjoying a cake provided by NTEU Chapter 24. Bon Appetit!

### POD Happenings

From the Farmington Hills office, retiring Steward **Ella Pride** reports:

The office had a combined luncheon for my birthday and a wedding shower for **Kerry Scho-**

**field**. She will be getting married on September 6, 2008. We were both surprised and thankful to all the groups here. The menu and decorations were beautiful - sage green and white. The food was excellent: lasagna prepared by **Derrick Inge**, and the kielbasa by **Judy Brocklebank**. The other participants prepared salads and desserts. Kerry and I want to send a humongous thanks to all of them for the gift cards and my cash. Thanks.

Steward **Mary Cook** reports: On September 15, 2008 NTEU Chapter 24 members in the East Lansing POD celebrated Labor Recognition Week with a cake bearing the statement: NTEU 70th Anniversary. All enjoyed the treat.

### RRA '98: Ten Years and Counting

"Who is in charge of the clattering train?  
The axles creak and the couplings strain,  
And the pace is hot, and the points are near,  
And sleep has deadened the driver's ear;  
And the signals flash through the night in vain,  
For Death is in charge of the clattering train."  
-unknown author

### We Get Letters

"Another great job on the Firebird. Thanks for the time and effort!!

I had a thought after reading Karen's article about performance ratings: maybe instead of everybody doing the manager's job and proving our worth, we should all try and work down to management's perceived level of effort...just a thought.

Keep up the good work."

### Overheard

Some psychologists assert the only way people change is through a traumatic experience, religious conversion, or brain surgery. That might explain why some IRS managers insist on making life traumatic for their employees, rather than trying to accommodate them. Let's hope these managers don't start carrying scalpels.

### Retirements

**Cheryl Deceuninck**-Revenue Officer in the Clinton Twp office retired August 15<sup>th</sup>.

**Don Goodwin** retired July 31. Don was a Revenue Agent in LMSB.

**Gary Kaminski**, SB/SE Revenue Agent retired August 29<sup>th</sup>.

**Kathy McHugh** also retired July 31. Kathy was a Revenue Agent in SBSE, a steward for Chapter

24, and the Chapter's Legislative Coordinator for many years.

**Melanie Penn** retired June 30. Melanie was a Revenue Agent in SBSE in the Farmington Hills POD.

**Ella Porter** is leaving IRS after 30 years of service. With her retirement, Chapter 24 will also be losing an accomplished and dedicated steward.

## Opinion/Editorial

A recent "IRS Headlines and More"... ran the following article:

*"Look for exit survey when you leave your IRS job*

*IRS has implemented a web-based, corporate exit survey to **enhance retention** [emphasis added] and recruitment efforts. You will receive information on how to take the survey at the time you leave IRS employment. Individual survey responses will be confidential; the focus will be on overall survey results. Participation is voluntary, but we encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity to tell about your employment with IRS. Your input is important as the Service strives to provide a work environment that meets the needs and expectations of both current employees and individuals considering a career with the IRS."*

Two thoughts on this: 1) If I'm about to retire, what do I care if my survey results are confidential? Would the Agency try to cancel my retirement eligibility? And (2), if IRS wants to "enhance retention", how about treating employees like valued assets instead of unwanted liabilities? Some employees already have this respect, and they tend to hang around beyond their retirement eligibility date, but it is assumed that the retention problem lies in those divisions where employees are nothing more than grist for management's mill. Hmmm...

And from Chief Steward **Karen Johnson**, this little epistle from the Agency's bag of epiphanies:

*"IRS Pledges Better Collection of Business Taxes*

*By Marcy Gordon*

*A top IRS official promised Congress Tuesday that the agency 'will do better' in collecting billions of taxes that businesses supposedly withheld from employees' paychecks but never remitted to the government.*

*Linda Stiff, a deputy Internal Revenue Service commissioner, agreed with senators—who criticized the agency's enforcement efforts—that the*

*loss of about \$58 billion in payroll taxes estimated to be owed the government is unacceptable. She said the IRS has made collecting those taxes a high priority.*

*While too high, the \$58 billion 'represents a snapshot of unpaid employment taxes' as part of a long-term improvement effort, Stiff testified at a hearing of the Senate Homeland Security Committee's investigative panel. 'Our numbers show dramatic improvement in the last several years, but we know we still have a long way to go.'*

*'We can and we will do better,' Stiff said.*" Shame on Linda Stiff for not supporting her "human capital". Just another example of how little the IRS thinks of their employees. How about getting a few more revenue officers on the job, while holding the taxpayers accountable for spending their employees' withholding to keep their doors open?

Perhaps the bottom line here is the IRS should recognize that they still need human beings to administer the nation's tax laws; not just technology. Treating employees with decency and respect, rewarding them for good work, with less alacrity for punishing trivial mistakes, could improve productivity, enhance retention, and boost the agency's image and reputation. But if past practice is any example, in response to the Congressional hearings the Agency will punish the innocent and reward the incompetent.



**Firebird 24**

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**Daniel Itchue, Vice President**  
**Marianne Gordon, Secretary**  
**Henry Morrison, Treasurer**  
**Karen Johnson, Chief Steward**

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**The National Treasury Employees Union**