

NTEUBulletin

2020: THE YEAR IN REVIEW

Chapter 177 (CBP Atlanta) gives hand sanitizer to members



2020 will be remembered as a year like no other, upending our lives at home and at work. Amid the upheaval, federal employees stepped up and delivered for our country when it needed them most. Here’s a look at where we started, how the working lives of our members changed and what’s next.

NTEU Members Step Up to Serve in Global Crisis

In what feels like ages ago, the year started with federal employees in their workplaces, maybe celebrating the new year with colleagues or attending events hosted by their chapters.

But by March, everything had changed. COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic, and for NTEU, there was nothing more important than the health and safety of federal employees.

The union quickly pivoted to crisis management mode, working quickly and closely with agencies to address the multitude of new and unprecedented workplace issues.

For starters, some agencies were slow to shut down operations at federal worksites despite the worsening health crisis. And although NTEU had pressed for years to increase telework, many agencies were unprepared for the large numbers of employees who would need to work remotely. Still other employees with caregiving duties and pre-existing conditions were facing leave denials.

Some workplaces could not be closed — including ports of entry where Customs and Border Protection employees continue to work around the clock. At the IRS, hundreds of employees were called back to workplaces in June to address a backlog of work that could not be done remotely. NTEU continues to press both agencies to take the necessary steps to keep employees safe and address their concerns.

In the early fall when the administration began pressuring agencies to prematurely plan for office reopenings, NTEU joined with lawmakers to raise strong objections. And as COVID-19 infections and deaths rise, NTEU will continue to demand that federally occupied buildings

“We’ve witnessed a massive test in telework that federal employees have aced.”

—NATIONAL PRESIDENT TONY REARDON

remain shut until it is safe for employees to return.

“The pandemic has hit close to home for our union with the deaths from COVID-19 of some of our members and colleagues,” said National President Tony Reardon. “We will not stop fighting to ensure the health and safety of employees whether they are working at home or in workplaces.”

Looking ahead to a post-pandemic future, NTEU will be pointing to the success of teleworking federal employees, who have proven to even the most skeptical that agency missions can be accomplished outside the office. NTEU will bring this message to Congress and agency leaders as the union continues to press for expanded telework opportunities for more employees after the pandemic subsides.

“We’ve witnessed a massive test in telework that federal employees have aced,” Reardon said. “COVID-19 swiftly eliminated the most significant barrier to telework in the federal sector — management resistance. Where some agencies once considered telework a benefit that they could roll back, now it is a lifeline.”

It’s difficult to predict when the pandemic will end or when life will return to some version of normal. But what remains certain is the commitment of federal employees to their agencies, their communities and their country during a crisis.

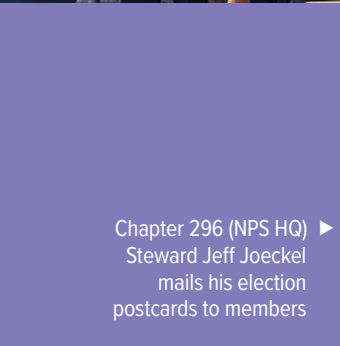
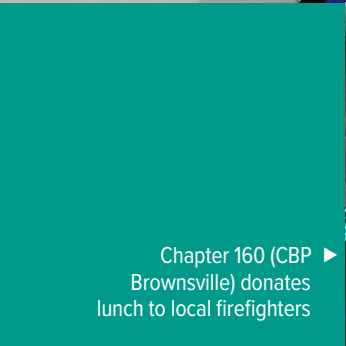
Resources on COVID-19, a memorial for our colleagues who have died from the virus and information on the NTEU Disaster Fund for those impacted are available at nteu.org.



Chapter 193 (IRS Puerto Rico) hands out safety kits to members in need



Chapter 251 (IRS Chief Counsel) celebrates a membership milestone



Chapter 160 (CBP Brownsville) donates lunch to local firefighters

Chapter 296 (NPS HQ) Steward Jeff Joeckel mails his election postcards to members



Tony Reardon
National President

A New Day for Federal Employees

For federal employees, the phrase “elections have consequences” has never been more true.

When you go to work on Thursday, Jan. 21, there will be no more executive orders threatening your rights, your contracts and our union’s ability to represent you.

There won’t be an HHS Secretary ordering his bargaining team to refuse to meet with NTEU representatives of frontline employees.

There won’t be an OPM Director determined to politicize the workforce and weaken his office’s own independence.

There won’t be a White House budget proposal to cut your retirement benefits and reduce your take-home pay.

There won’t be a president attempting to single-handedly rewrite the civil service rules to try and fire as many career federal employees as he can.

I’d say those are some important consequences.

President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris were the smart choice for federal employees. NTEU members should be proud of our role in encouraging Americans to exercise their vote and for choosing candidates who value the merit-based civil service. Armed with facts about the candidates’ positions on our issues, we made sure the voices of federal employees were heard loud and clear in races across the country. Of the House and Senate races where we endorsed, NTEU-supported candidates won 199 of them, or 84 percent, with a handful of races still to be decided including two important Senate runoffs in Georgia.

The bottom line is that federal employees will have more allies in Washington next year. When we take our requests for fair pay and adequate agency funding to Capitol Hill and the White House, we’ll have friendlier audiences. If your retirement benefits, health insurance or workplace rights are threatened, we’ll have powerful friends to help us fight back.

While we should celebrate the victories, there is difficult work ahead. The federal debt rose by more than \$7 trillion over the last four years, so we must be on guard for those who want to tackle the deficit by reducing federal employee benefits. And as the COVID-19 pandemic rages on, we anticipate even greater challenges: ensuring public-facing employees are among the first in line for the vaccine and warning agencies not to backslide on workplace safety or bring back teleworking employees too soon. NTEU also continues to pursue expanded flexible scheduling and leave options for families juggling work and caregiving responsibilities.

The 2020 election results are an opportunity to repair the labor-management relationship across government and we have presented the Biden-Harris transition team with a list of concrete steps to do just that. Already we are seeing future Cabinet members speak reverently for their frontline workers and commit to their agency missions.

Here is Treasury Secretary nominee Janet Yellen on the day Biden introduced his economic team: “To the great public servants of the Treasury Department, I look forward to working with you and [Deputy Treasury Secretary nominee Adewale “Wally” Adeyemo] to rebuild the public trust. To the American people, we will be an institution that wakes up every morning thinking about you: your jobs, your paychecks, your struggles, your hopes, your dignity and your limitless potential.”

It is, indeed, a new day for federal employees. Wishing you a safe and joyous holiday season. NTEU is honored to be by your side in 2021 and beyond.



NTEU MISSION

To organize federal
employees to work
together to ensure that
every federal employee
is treated with dignity
and respect.

NTEUBulletin

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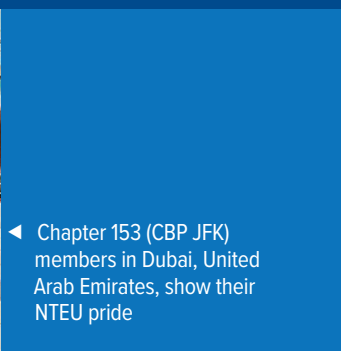
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◀ NTEU members get excited for the 2020 elections at the annual Legislative Conference

◀ Chapter 153 (CBP JFK) members in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, show their NTEU pride

In a Tough Year, NTEU Stands United to Protect Workers

In a year with no shortage of challenges, NTEU staved off numerous attacks on federal employees by standing united.

The year began with yet another alarming budget proposal, as the White House again took aim at federal retirement benefits, with proposals to cut pensions, increase FEHBP premiums and drastically cut funding at NTEU-represented agencies. Just like the last three years, NTEU worked with congressional allies to defeat the harmful proposals.

In August, the president signed a memorandum giving employers the option to defer Social Security taxes for the remainder of 2020. After most private sector businesses declined to participate in the program, the administration rolled it out across the federal government, making it mandatory for employees.

The implementation was nothing short of chaotic. Details were scant and confusing, with employees left in the dark about when they would see a change in their paychecks and how agencies would collect the deferred taxes. NTEU repeatedly urged the administration to provide details to employees, and at the same time worked with lawmakers to introduce legislation to make the deferral optional for employees. The union also called for giving employees more time to pay back the debt forced on them. The situation still remains unresolved for impacted employees but NTEU will continue to press for corrective measures.

Good news came in October when the administration abandoned plans to move personnel policy from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), an independent agency, into the White House. Both NTEU and lawmakers warned that the proposal, first announced in May 2019, would weaken civil service protections and politicize the federal government.

However, October ended with another brazen attack—an executive order (EO) creating a new Schedule F class of career federal employees, stripping their due process protections and exposing them to being fired for political reasons. The order gives agency heads a deadline—one day before Inauguration Day—to provide lists of positions that would be shifted to this new classification.

NTEU immediately fired back with a lawsuit asking the court to declare the order unlawful and prevent the administration from implementing it. The union again turned to its congressional allies, this time securing proposed legislation that would rescind the order and block funding for it. NTEU also supported multiple letters from House and Senate members seeking a provision to stop the order in fiscal 2021 spending legislation.

This, of course, is not the first executive order from this administration targeting federal employees. Since they were issued in May 2018, NTEU has been battling a trio of executive orders attacking federal employee collective bargaining rights. Throughout this year and at nearly every bargaining table, NTEU continued to face regressive proposals inspired by these orders seeking to hollow out contracts. NTEU has refused to take these rollbacks lying down and unleashed a slew of grievances in multiple agencies, all setting up court challenges to the EOs.

In one such grievance at the Patent and Trademark Office (PTO), NTEU won a first-ever decision from a neutral arbitrator who agreed that portions of the orders violate labor-management law. The grievance against PTO was filed after the agency started implementing the EOs by adding new restrictions and barriers to union work.

With a new administration and agency leadership on the horizon, NTEU is looking

ahead to President-elect Biden rescinding the orders and to a more collaborative approach to bargaining. Without the executive orders, agencies would no longer be under pressure to gut negotiated rights, benefits and protections.

This was undoubtedly a trying year for federal employees and NTEU, but in the end, it reinforced what we've known all along: that federal employees are most powerful when we stand together in the face of threats and fight for what's right.

Zero to 3.1%

Federal employees began 2020 with the largest pay raise they had received in a decade—but it didn't come without a fight.

Once again, 2019 began with a proposed pay freeze in the administration's budget. NTEU refused to accept it and immediately began advocating for a 3.1 percent average raise, which the House later agreed to.

But even when the administration reversed course in the summer of 2019 and called for 2.6 percent, it was only an across the board increase and did not include any locality pay adjustments. NTEU fought all the way through the appropriations process until the final compromise spending bill provided a 3.1 percent average raise with 0.5 percent toward locality pay.

Every year brings another fight for a fair pay raise. And every year, federal employees can count on NTEU to work aggressively to secure an increase that reflects their hard work and achievements.

Historic Year for Federal Families: Paid Parental Leave

It was 20 years in the making and this year it became a reality. Starting in October, paid parental leave became available to federal employees who welcome a new child into their homes.

"For the first time in history, federal workers won't have to choose between their families and their paychecks when it comes to bonding with their new arrivals," said National President Tony Reardon. "Paid parental leave is the largest expansion of federal leave benefits in recent history."

NTEU first endorsed legislation for the program in 2000, but it was not until last December that Congress approved 12 weeks of paid parental leave for federal employees, effective for children born, adopted or placed for fostering, starting Oct. 1.

Future NTEU Members!

Baby photos submitted by members enjoying the new paid parental leave benefit



Up until a few weeks before the Oct. 1 start date, NTEU was fighting for full implementation of the law. In September, NTEU opposed proposed regulations that would have made it harder for new parents to access the program.

"Federal employees who maintain their commitment to public service while also becoming parents deserve a little extra help to manage it all," said Reardon. "NTEU is honored to have played a part in making the federal government a more family-friendly workplace for generations to come."

NTEU's work on this issue continues, as the union advocates for a broader paid family leave program to help employees take time off to care for seriously ill family members or themselves if they have a serious medical condition.

2020 WHAT MATTERED TO YOU

In 2020, NTEU members sent more than 90,000 letters to members of Congress from our Legislative Action Center. Here are the top issues that garnered the most emails:

Health and safety issues around COVID-19

Modified scheduling for CBP employees at ports of entry

Hazard duty pay for public-facing federal employees

A fair pay increase for 2021

Make 2021 a year of action at action.nteu.org

NTEU Bulletin

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IN CASE
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Legislative Conference Draws Hundreds of Members

NTEU held its annual Legislative Conference early this year drawing 400 NTEU members to Washington, D.C. Members visited nearly every congressional office advocating for NTEU's priority issues including fair pay, benefits and workplace rights. Attendees also heard from the chair of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform, Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), the leading congressional advocate in the fight for paid parental leave.

NTEU Supports Racial Justice

In the wake of George Floyd's death, NTEU spoke out against the long history of racism in our country. "As a labor union, we must stand up for those who feel voiceless by linking our arms with theirs and we must speak up and speak out in support of ALL those we represent," National President Tony Reardon said.

A Strong Voice on Capitol Hill

NTEU either testified in person or submitted testimony more than six times this year. Throughout the pandemic, National President Tony Reardon brought employee concerns to members of Congress and kept health and safety issues at the forefront. NTEU also testified in support of maximum telework for more employees and hazard pay for public-facing workers. These efforts were backed by numerous letters from Reardon to lawmakers and letters and phone calls from NTEU members.

Standing Up for Federal Scientists

In a year when Americans depended on government to help bring about a COVID-19 vaccine, the administration repeatedly attacked federal scientists. NTEU took a stand, voicing strong support for legislation protecting the professional integrity of federal scientists from political pressure and influence that could compromise their work. And in a September letter in the *Wall Street Journal*, NTEU joined with a coalition of 80 public health organizations in urging leaders of federal health agencies to shield government scientists from political interference.

More Back Pay Wins

Every year, NTEU wins tens of thousands of dollars in back pay and 2020 was no different. At CBP, around 57 Supply Chain Security Specialists shared \$1.6 million in back pay and damages from two grievances. More than 600 HHS employees received back pay and damages totaling \$1.7 million, adding to \$2 million already distributed under multiple NTEU-won settlements and awards.

Mourning Longtime Congressional Allies

This year, NTEU mourned the deaths of Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) and former Sen. Paul Sarbanes (D-Md.). Lewis, a civil rights icon and longtime ally of labor and federal employees, collaborated with NTEU on workplace issues including legislation to end the use of private tax collectors at the IRS. Sarbanes was a staunch advocate for federal employees, whether the issue was fair pay, agency funding or enhanced retirement benefits for CBP Officers. Both Lewis and Sarbanes addressed members at past NTEU Legislative Conferences.



◀ Chapter 173 (CBP Detroit) takes members to the drive-in



◀ Chapter 295 (EPA San Francisco) member Jeanette Sasek gets out the vote