#### I WENT TO THE NEW YORK CONVENTION, RAN FOR NATIONAL PRESIDENT, & ALL I GOT WAS THIS "WEST WING" T-SHIRT, Page 14



THE

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**VOLUME 5, ISSUE 10** 

**OF CHAPTER 247** 

As John Lennon and Yoko Ono famously declared during the Vietnam conflict, "War is over! If you want it." It was an audacious display of optimism when they made the proclamation-in 1969when the end was still far. far away.

It was perhaps a similar case of The next week, Eddie was back in built in a day. But now, many wishful thinking when IRS management presented NTEU with a comparably upbeat message at the Business Improvement Committee (BIC) meeting at IRS Headquarters in Washington, DC, back in April. NTEU National President Colleen Kelley and IRS Deputy Commissioner Linda (currently Acting Commissioner) co-chaired the meeting, with Chapter 247 President Eddie Walker and other NTEU leaders participating. In fact, it was in response to questioning by Eddie that the Deputy Commish strongly implied that a new era of cooperation between Management and NTEU was imminent: "When you return [to your sites], you'll notice a change."

Considering the anti-union, antiemployee posture of the IRS over recent years, this was quite a

news flash. The notion that management could Agency become neighborly overnightparticularly notoriously footdragging management at the local level—was a stunner.

Texas, co-chairing the Austin Labor-Management Relations Committee (LMRC) meeting, attended by the three Austin Campus Directors, and Chapter Leaders from Austin, Dallas, Denver, and Puerto

Rico. The Chapter 247 President described the BIC meeting and Linda Stiff's commitment to a cozier NTEU/Management relationship. This was an eye-opener for the Directors, who joked that they didn't "get the memo."

We know, we know...Rome wasn't months later, how has the Agency's pledge trickled down to the Austin Campus? Here's an update, complete with Chapter 247's grades for each Director. (Continued on page 7)

#### HIGH-LEVEL MANAGEMENT... IS THE SUIT HALF FULL OR HALF EMPTY?



#### POWER TO THE PEOPLE!

The News: It's All Good See Why On Page 2.

#### *TOLL* FREE-FOR-ALL

Has AM Management Lost It? Find It On Page 4.

#### DO YOU HAVE A

BEST FRIEND AT WORK? You're Not The Only One! See Page 3.

#### CAFÉ SOCIETY

**Q&A With The Cafeteria Manager** Bite Into Page 3.

THE VOICE IS PREPARED AND PRODUCED FOR THE SOLE PURPOSE OF INFORMING OUR BARGARUNG UNIT EMPLOYESS. ALL OTHERS READ AT THEIR OWN RISK.

#### **POWER TO THE PEOPLE!**

Chapter 247 leaders attended the March 2008 Legislative Conference in Washington, DC, where the Chapter was recognized as winner of National NTEU's POWER Program Award in the Service Center Chapter category. National President College Kelley and Executive Vice President Frank Ferris presented the honor to Chapter 247 President Eddie Walker, Executive Vice President Julia Miller, and First Vice President—and Chapter Coordinator of our Legislative program-Russell Bokelman. The inscription on the award thanked 247 for its "dedication to legislative and political action." To find out more about NTEU's legislative lobbying and education efforts, drop in and talk to your Chapter Leaders. And while you're at it, stop by the display case in front of the union office to get a good look at the award.

Recent days have been great for Chapter 247. Along with the POWER Award, we reached the stunning milestone of 75% membership. Talk about POWER to the People!

#### SAL MACIAS - WHAT'S NEXT?

Chapter 247 said farewell to one of its most dedicated warriors when Chief Steward *Salvador (Sal) Macias, Jr.* retired from the Agency on January 31, 2008, with twelve years of IRS service. His public service career, however, is more varied. Sal is a longtime union member who worked with such greats as César Chávez. He served in both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. His cultured and diverse background made him a tremendous asset to Chapter 247. Sal knew the value of Union, and he could always be counted on to bring his immense experience to help employees and support our Chapter.

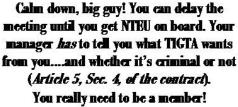
Sal was particularly proud of helping to get the Toll Free bilingual team started, and he was working on bilingual issues on the day that he left. Sal is currently seeking to obtain his master's and doctoral degrees, and to receive his international real estate license. Although our colleague is moving on to another chapter in his life, one Chapter that will never leave *him* is Chapter 247. Our door is always open for Sal Macias.

Highlights for Children Magazine, a fixture in doctors' offices for decades, features Goofus & Callant, two cartoon boys who respond in opposite ways to every social situation. Goofus is feckless and self-centered, Gallant is a princely role model among his cartoon peers. The purpose is to demonstrate to young readers how to play nicely with others.

In that great tradition, we asked *Voice* artist *Dobi Early* to create *Doofus & Darling*, two IRS employees with contrasting points of view. Doofus sees no reason to join the union. Darling is a longtime member of NTEU. Any similarity to actual persons is purely coincidental. Yeah, right!

Doofus and Darling

My manager's sending me to meet with TICTA. I haven't done anything crooked...at least that I can remember! This could be my job!! I'm too old to go to prison!!!







THE VOICE

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### DO YOU HAVE A BEST FRIEND AT WORK?

#### **Ex-Commissioner Everson Did!**

IRS Commissioner *Mark Everson* left the Agency for an impressive new job title—President and CEO of the Red Cross—only to rendezvous with national disgrace and his ouster *six months later...* and the humiliating offense that led to his firing was the very thing that he warned us about!

In a memo to all IRS employees regarding the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH), Everson ballyhooed the IRS' commitment to a work environment free of sexual harassment. He boldly proclaimed, "Sexual harassment is unacceptable conduct and will not be tolerated. Such conduct, whether it is committed by executives, managers, employees or nonemployees, is specifically prohibited. The IRS is totally committed to taking all necessary steps to create and maintain an environment that will ensure that no employee is subjected to such harassment."

Cut to Everson's next power base and stepping stone, the Red Cross. If only former Commissioner Everson had transplanted those lofty sentiments to his new position. Alas, according to The New York Post, Mark E. made his mark by "having an affair with a subordinate," therefore triggering his sacking by the organization's Board of Governors "after six months on the job."

Everson reportedly met the woman in question—identified by *The New York Times* as the head of a Red Cross chapter on the Gulf Coast—while the pair were traveling together in a mission to restore the reputation of the Red Cross following a less than stellar performance by the group during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. While walking amid the destruction, the couple's focus apparently wandered. It seems that, among public servants at the higher levels, devastation is the

new sexy.

Media accounts noted that the ex-Commish and his former employee are both married to others, with two children each. At the time the scandal broke, there was another child on the way for the woman involved.

The Red Cross board demanded and received Everson's immediate resignation. Their statement was to the point: "The board acted quickly after learning that Mr. Everson engaged in a personal relationship with a subordinate employee. It concluded that the situation reflected poor judgment on Mr. Everson's part and diminished his ability to lead the organization in the future." Adding to the orgy of irony, Everson's wife was once ethics officer in the current White House!

Everson was hired after an unusually long search by the Red Cross, which has suffered a great deal of bad press in recent years, due in large part to questionable judgment displayed by its leadership in the allocation of disaster relief. Everson's actions were the last straw for the frustrated board.

Many IRS employees joshed that, now that Everson's behavior had been censured by the *bluenoses* of the *Red Cross*, he could return as Commissioner, in an environment where he had previously thrived, and where hypocrisy is better appreciated!

### **CAFÉ SOCIETY**

#### By Tanni Baxter NTEU Cafeteria Liaison

A question and answer session was held with cafeteria contractor Otis Breeden and Cafeteria liaison Tanni Baxter.

Why did you cut the hours of operation?

Between the hours of 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., there was only a \$25.00 profit.

Why did you need two people on staff if business was slow?

We have to have two people for sanitation reasons: one person to cook, and another to take care of the register. What about your portion sizes? We have received several complaints.

All our portions are measured, and we are in compliance with the GSA. How does a dissatisfied customer contact you?

My e-mail address is <u>caju-nod@austin.rr.com</u>, and you can contact me personally at 416-9799, between the hours of 5:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. Also, I'm in the process of setting up a cafeteria website...there will be a section for comments, complaints, and suggestions.

Should we expect any price increases?

Yes! Coke is increasing their products by 10%. Twenty-ounce Cokes will cost \$1.30, energy drinks will increase to \$2.39, and juices will increase to \$1.50. Regular lunches and breakfast will stay the same. The salad bar is going up to 20 cents an ounce, because most of the items are seasonal, and you pay more when they are not in season. Lunch specials will increase to \$3.99. The lunch increases are due to an employee 3 percent pay raise, and the cost of goods have gone up 10%.

When should we expect the price increases?

When GSA approves them...

What changes have you made?

We use better products, and the food is better as a result.

Why don't we have a dollar menu like Wendy's?

Wendy's buys in bulk. I buy from Sam's Club, but we do have some items that cost a dollar. You can buy some fries, a burrito, nachos, or a taco for a dollar.

What has been your biggest challenge?

Working with the Union. I've never worked with employees who belong to a union; they are more engaged. 75% of our employees do belong to the Union, and you can't do

without our business.

# TOLL FREE-FOR-ALL

### AM Management\_Have They Lost It? And Can They Get It Back?

October 1, 2007 was the day that Jill Smith took charge as Manager of Austin Accounts Management, Operation 2. Over the next few days, the Chapter 247 Office experienced some of the largest traffic ever, as AM Op 2 employees poured through the door to report that Management had—well, to faithfully characterize the tenor of the scuttlebutt—lost it.

At the end of that wild week, NTEU President Eddie Walker shared NTEU's concerns with AM Director Dick Auby:

The Chapter 247 office is receiving an unusual amount of critical feedback from Operation 2 employees this week. According to the employees, they are being put on and taken off of the phones frequently. As a result, it is difficult for them to focus properly on their inventory and close cases efficiently. In addition, employees characterize management as acting 'confused' and cite them for projecting that impression out onto the floor."

Referring to the reassignment of Jill Smith, and the implementation of the so-called "blending" of Operations 1 and 2, Eddie wrote the Director, "No doubt some of the disruption in the workplace is due to changes made recently by AM."

As he did in every case where an issue arose with NTEU, Director Dick responded by delegating employee interests to his underlings. Chapter 247 met to discuss the turmoil with Jill and Acting Toll Free Chief Denise Lage. At that session, it appeared to NTEU leaders that Denise was the management official with a stronger knowledge of the workings of Operation 2.

But that's Management's newest

craze, "developing" managers by moving them to operations that they are unaccustomed to. Former Compliance Director—now W&I Deputy Commissioner—Pam Watson brought the concept to Austin (see "War Is Over," page 1). Dick Auby jumped on the bandwagon, perversely swapping longtime Op 1/Toll Free manager Jill Smith with Op 2/Adjustments Honcho Anna Medlock.

"This policy was hit by a lazy stick...No computations.
No 'fuzzy math.' Just non-management Management."

But instead, on October 1, 2007—the day that the switcheroo was to take place—Anna was shipped across the street to commandeer Austin Compliance's Automated Underreporter (AUR) operation. This move made Denise Lage Acting Op 1 Manager, and effectively exiled Anna—dubbed the "Queen of Mean" in earlier issues of *The Voice*—from Chapter 247's territory.

Anna's displacement, and the seeming detachment of Dick, left Jill in an enviable position at the head of Op 2—free to experiment with any pet management theories she might have, able to further implement unpopular policies associated with the notorious ex-Director *Charles Washington's* reign, and yet, without Charles'—or Dick's—meddling. *Talk about a dream job!* 

In her discussions with NTEU, Jill portrayed Austin AM's latest

employee-unfriendly actions as dictated by the sudden and insatiable demands of Agency Brass dispensing edicts from a location far away. Yet, the wholesale denial of leave during peak season, and the herding of employees into 9:30 a.m.-6:00 p.m. Tours Of Duty in violation of Chapter 247's local Alternative Work Schedules agreement, are counterproductive and cruel policies first rolled out a few years ago. They are the cornerstone of Austin AM's mistreatment of employees.

247 has filed its annual mass grievance over TODs. Last year, we were effective in changing TODs for grievants; this season, we have included many more employees, so we expect the fight to be a case of further bad news for Management.

Meanwhile, the Union will battle AM's leave policy, a strategy that is as ruthless as any we have been able to find at any other call site. Management has increased the number of "leave denial days" to nineteen this year, with the threat of more to come.

This policy was hit by a lazy stick. Rather than calculate just how much leave is available, and allocate that leave based on time-honored formulas—legal and contractual formulas—Austin designates high-volume phone days and nixes all leave, 100%. On other days, Management allows 100% of leave. No computations. No "fuzzy math." Just non-management Management.

In NTEU's meeting with Jill and Denise, the twosome tried—but were unable to convince the Chapter—that AM's slacker method of denying leave was cooked up by

# TOLL FREE-FOR-ALL

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

faceless bureaucrats in some far away situation room, or by anyone other than the old Charles Washington team.

Despite the grumblings employees, and despite the input of NTEU, AM leadership has not responded to this season's challenges with any visible burst of competence. With Jill overseeing Op 2, Management's dream of Phone Land is advancing by leaps and bounds-and stumbles and pratfalls. Leads are on the phone with greater frequency; Contact Reps are forced to function without their Leads; new hires are scratching their heads, waiting eternally for answers to their questions...and it will likely get worse before it gets better.

Still, it is first line managers who seem to be most frustrated by the ascension of Jill Smith. Our Management sources report that they have been buried in reports, and are so tied up by what they consider Jill's micromanagement, that they have little time to manage their teams.

This, then, is what Austin Accounts Management intends by the "blending" of Ops 1 and 2. Blending means Toll Free for all employees—or perhaps it means a Toll Free employee free-for-all, as when Jill Smith used the recent briefings of AM employees to score her biggest blunder yet.

Chapter 247 was notified that AM would be conducting employee briefings over a Service Level Agreement signed by the Taxpayer Advocate Service (TAS) and the Commissioner of Wage and Investment (W&I). As the Union pointed out in the briefings, a national grievance had already been filed over the matter. Chapter 247 President Eddie Walker requested

that any concerns by Austin employees be passed on to him, so that he could elevate them to the NTEU National President in Washington, at a meeting set for a couple of weeks away. In other words, this was a national issue, and Austin AM had little, if any, responsibility for the changes or their impact.

"Blending means Toll Free for all employees—or perhaps it means a Toll Free employee free-for-all, as when Jill Smith used the recent briefings of AM employees to score her biggest blunder yet."

For two peaceful days, NTEU Stewards were able to attend the meetings, listen to employees, and deliver this simple, hardly controversial message without incident. Then, Management suddenly went off the track.

On day three of the briefings, AM managers disrupted the sessions by interrupting the Union, claiming that NTEU had no right to speak. This, of course, was false. The TAS briefings were "formal meetings." As the contract says, "In any formal meeting...the Union representative will be identified. The representative may ask relevant questions and may make a statement of the Union's position respecting the subject of the meeting."

Eddie had gone over briefing procedures with Operation Manager Della Thomas at the time that the meetings were set up. Unfortunately, by the date of the meetings, Della and the Acting Director were in travel status.

The comparison with AM's counterparts in the Compliance Directorate couldn't be starker. Eddie was scheduled to alternate representing the Union at AM's TAS briefings with his participation in Exam Operation employee focus group sessions. Compliance upper management conducted its meetings with conspicuous professionalism, courteousness, and respect for the Union. As has been the case in recent years, Austin AM Management was scoring a poor second to its rivals in Compliance.

Meanwhile, NTEU Chapter Leaders Julia Miller, Russell Bokelman, and Tonia Gilmore—all were interrupted in their attempts to speak by AM Management. Paul Morgan, Cathy Snyder, Carl Ochs, Margaret Boston, Alicia Hagen, Ethel Mitchell, Emily Gutierrez, and even Jill Smith herself were enlisted as Management enforcers in a hapless bid to silence the Union. Jill even snatched a copy of a Union memo that Russell had given to an employee out of the employee's hand.

Employees were flooding into the Union Office, deeply disturbed, deeply amused—or both. It seemed outrageous. How long would it take for Jill to realize how silly Management looked by the commotion?

Too long, it turned out. The 3:00 p.m. briefing was the most notorious example of Management mishegoss. Eddie and Tonia were attending on behalf of NTEU. At first, it seemed as if Management was observing a sensible, laidback posture; but then, Managers began to mass from out of nowhere, con-

## *Toll* free-for-all

gregating in the back of the room, evoking the atmosphere of Alfred Hitchcock's classic horror movie, The Birds. Storm clouds were gathering.

Lying low, apparently anticipating a dream opportunity for a Tippi Hedren-style star turn, was Jill Smith protégé and Op 1 Department Manager Cathy Snyder. Incredibly, about 30 seconds into Eddie's remarks, Cathy stomped up to the 6'2" Chapter President, stood over him (he was seated), and ordered him to be quiet. When he cited the contract language and pointed out that he had received Della Thomas' buy in prior to the briefings, Cathy issued Eddie a "directive" to stop speaking.

When Tonia tried to make a statement, the Department Manager "directed" her to cease as well. The approximately 40 employees in the room watched in astonishment. One CR ventured to ask Eddie guestions, but Cathy refused to acknowledge the employee, and persisted in her mission to silence NTEU. Another employee offered Cathy the Nazi salute, and asked the Department Manager whether she was now required to salute Management. Others protested that this was "still the United States of America," and demanded that the Union be allowed to speak. As one CR described it, it was "a Norma Rae moment."

Now warding off ridicule, Cathy stumbled onward, threatening Eddie and Tonia with ejection by the guards. First line manager Ethel Mitchell, with observable eagerness, ran downstairs to summon them.

The Department Manager insisted that the briefer be allowed to "finish the meeting." However, she had already finished, which is why Eddie was speaking in the first place. The briefer had nothing more to say, and Cathy called the meeting to a close. The employees complained that the session was cut short of the scheduled 60 minutes, but they were curtly ordered to get back on the phones. No more

questions for you!

The remainder of the TAS briefings were not as colorful, but AM assigned three Department Managers to attend each meeting, and each time attempted to intimidate the Union, to no avail.

The saddest result of the whole affair was that-due to the injudicious oversight of Jill Smithmanagers who did not enjoy her poor reputation with employees, nor share her seeming appetite for union bashing, were swept into her universe, and were made to look petty, venal, and generally ridiculous. The Union will file an Unfair Labor Practice charge against Jill Smith, and will name the following individuals.

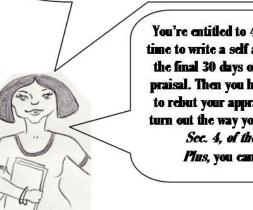
When push came to shove almost literally-Paul Morgan, Cathy Snyder, Carl Ochs, Margaret Boston, Alicia Hagen, Ethel Mitchell, Emily Gutierrez, and especially Jill Smith—all failed to properly exercise their leadership responsibilities. Is this what the future of AM looks like? Heaven help us.

I think my manager's planning to sock it to me on my annual appraisal! I've caught her smiling at me all week long, which means she's out to get me again!! There goes my performance award!!!



### Doofus and Darling

You are so high maintenance! When are you going to join NTEU so you can stop sweating this stuff!?



You're entitled to 4 hours of official time to write a self assessment during the final 30 days of your annual appraisal. Then you have up to 4 hours to rebut your appraisal if it doesn't turn out the way you like (Article 12, Sec. 4, of the contract).

Plus, you can grieve it!!!



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

#### SUBMISSION PROCESSING

All three of the Austin Directors—Submission Processing, Compliance, and Accounts Management—were newbies this past year, coming on board in January 2007. The Submission Processing Director is also known as the Senior Commissioner Representative, or simply the Campus Director. Even though Chapter 247 does not represent Submission Processing employees, our members feel the impact of judgments made by the SPB Director, Kathleen Bushnell, and the Campus-wide Site Coordinator, Brenda Ray.

For example, among decisions upheld by the current Campus Director are the banning of the IRS Gospel Choir from Campus cafeterias during Black History Month, the denial of Peak Overtime to most Campus employees, and the cutbacks of *e-file* services; all of these actions are reversals of longtime popular Campus policies.

The Director has yet to demonstrate an understanding of the role NTEU plays in the workplace, partnership or no partnership. When it comes to notification, negotiations, and the basic communication that is required of management-even in the worst of times-NTEU has been the party to initiate cooperation. Over the past year, the Campus Director and/or the Site Coordinator have moved to implement policies unilaterally, without regard to the law or to the contract. Typically, it has remained for the Union-and this includes Austin Chapters 247 and 72-to call management on its actions.

As the Management Co-Chair of the Austin Labor-Management Relations Committee, the Campus Director has a golden opportunity to exert leadership for more cooperation between NTEU and the Directors. The LMRC—which you can read about in Article 46 in the contract—has become a more important institution,

due to Management's unilateral shutdown of long-established meeting opportunities, such as the now extinct Campus-wide Site Council.

The aims of the LMRC are: 1) "building strong relationships" between the Union and the Directors; 2) exchanging information; 3) affording the Union pre-decisional input in matters of local personnel policies, practices, and working conditions; and 4) resolving problems informally "in an effort to avoid protracted and costly negotiations or grievance proceedings."

"It should be no surprise that a Director... is tempted to think that he or she can lead a Campus while ignoring important constituencies."

Instead of pursuing these lofty goals—which are sensible, from a business perspective—Management has consistently attempted to throw a wrench into the process. According to other Chapter Presidents across the country, this is true of Management nationwide. Still, Austin's Directors have embraced a variety of local strategies to undermine the LMRC.

For example, Management has repeatedly attempted to limit the issues that can be discussed at LMRC meetings; they have tried to shorten the length of meetings; they have declined to provide information requested by the Union; they have disrupted meetings by being argumentative; and they have refused to release from work one out-of-town member of the NTEU team in order to attend a recent LMRC. The Campus Director has done little to discourage these persistent and transparent union-baiting games.

Hubris has been the watchword for Agency Big Shots over the past several years. Management has told itself that it don't need no stinkin' union to get things done. So it should be no surprise that a Director, new to town, is tempted to think that he or she can lead a Campus while ignoring important constituencies. This year, a lack of teamwork exhibited itself during the Combined Federal Campaign. Coincidently (or not?), the Austin Campus fell short of its CFC goal, an uncommon and disheartening failure.

To sum up, the Campus Director has not shown an appreciation of the positive influence of NTEU in the workplace, and she has worked with the Union only as a last resort. It therefore has fallen upon NTEU to use the legal and extralegal tools we have in order to bring the Union into its rightful place in the policymaking process.

After many months of tactical pressure, grievances, and relentless lobbying, NTEU has seen some give and take on the part of the Campus Director to resolve issues; at other times we have noted a retreat by Management to the old pattern of dodging responsibility.

Because there have been intermittent episodes of cooperation, and even occasional attempts at improving communication, from the SPB Director, Chapter 247 believes that she deserves some credit—just a notch below what Harvard University has traditionally labeled a "Gentleman's 'C'."

SP/Campus Director's Grade: C-

#### COMPLIANCE

Pam Watson can best be described as more polished than the typical Austin Director. This probably reflects the fact that the Agency had already designated Pam as ready for prime time before sending her here. Prior to

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

embarking upon her position as Austin's Compliance Director, Pam had the grander title of Deputy Commissioner for Wage and Investment. And, by summer's end, the news came down that Pam was ascending to her old job. While here, however, she outclassed her colleagues in communication skills, and she was consistent in "talking the talk" to Chapter 247.

"Walking the walk," however, was a different story. Despite a willingness to give the Union its props, Pam did not forge beyond her predecessors and usher in a golden age of cooperation. In fact, there is little evidence that her stint as Director resulted in much significant change for the Compliance operations represented by Chapter 247.

ACS is an area where NTEU has maintained an effective relationship with Management, through good times and bad. Operation leaders are practical minded enough to deal with the Union in a professional manner, and they have frequently proven to be receptive to employee input. One important byproduct of this flexibility is that Austin has a record of success that compares favorably to other ACS call sites.

Not all ACS managers are effective listeners, however, and that leads to the need for frequent communication between Management and what the contract rightfully points out to be "the sole representative of the employees," NTEU.

Important matters that remain unresolved include the issue of employee stress. Despite years of discussion, much agreement, and repeated commitments to NTEU and employees, Management has proven unable to fully follow through with a realistic approach to reforming the workplace. First line managers are feeling the pressure, and they are passing it on to their employees. On careful examination, it is clear that many of Austin ACS' issues originate from national policies, such as the steep cutback in Inventory Days. (As NTEU members know, Chapter 247 has played an important part in the ongoing national grievance over that issue.) Due to the focus on phones, ACS inventory mounts, as does the burden on Collection Representatives to work more and more cases in less and less time. Managers have inappropriately approached CRs directly to ask them how many cases they have resolved.

press at some point. How do employees decompress if they can't take leave? Unfortunately, unless CRs want to take a nice Tuesday or Wednesday vacation to Aruba, they had better not make any plans because Monday they are needed on the phones!

Exam is in the same boat as ACS, in the sense that it is an Austin operation rocked by issues created at the national level. Most recent local problems have surfaced as a consequence of an Agencywide effort



For many ACS managers, the bottom line demands that employees be judged by quantity of cases closed; but with rules and procedures constantly in flux, it is nearly impossible for workers to keep up. CRs are expected to maintain perfect quality at ever increasing rates of speed, despite constant updates and changes; they are approached reproachfully. reports in hand, if breaks or lunches are even one or two minutes over the allotted time: bathroom breaks are expected to be short, unless a doctor's note is provided; sick leave is frowned upon: and annual leave is treated as an alien concept.

Astronauts, who are well-trained and physically sturdy, need to decom-

to turn Exam into a phone operation. The rollout of the extension routing system has met a major management objective by ensuring that taxpayer calls are answered. It has not, however, addressed the employee concern that taxpayer questions be accurately answered as well.

The stats make Management look good. Under extension routing, chances have increased dramatically that taxpayers will find a Tax Examiner they can talk to; they are unlikely, however, to reach a TE with indepth knowledge of their case. This frustrates Austin's Exam employees, who are not as eager as Agency Big



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Wigs to consider an answered call that defers results to another day as a goal that's met. As with many of the initiatives rolled out in Compliance these days, the emphasis is on successful bean counting, not satisfying taxpayer service.

Like ACS, Austin Exam's Management team has proven flexible enough to re-tweak its plans when those plans create a negative impact on the business of the Operation—and that includes resulting harm to its employees. Chapter 247 regularly meets with Exam Management to tackle these issues. Again, this rational approach to dealing with the Union makes good business sense for Management.

So far, however, a solution has not emerged that can resolve the conflict between phones and inventory. Exam employees are frequently distracted from working their own cases by extension routed calls. Productivity has suffered, but in a departure from Management's usual obsession with numbers, it is the results-oriented TEs who are most disconcerted by the diminishing case closures.

In a series of focus groups attended by employees, NTEU's Eddie Walker, and Acting Compliance Director Denice Vaughan, Denice underscored that TEs and CRs should view accuracy and satisfying the taxpavers as their priorities, and not be obsessed with the numbers game. W&I's head of Compliance, Jim Grimes, agreed with this philosophy when Eddie spoke with him recently about Austin Exam's issues. As for Chapter 247, it is our priority that—until the Union can disentangle these continuing snags at the national level—employees not be penalized in their evaluations and/or their working conditions.

If ACS and Exam's challenges stem primarily from Agencywide demands, the case can be made that Austin's Collection Operation (CSCO) has

problems that are almost exclusively of its own making.

Since the IRS centered its Automated Substitute For Return (ASFR) program in Austin, our CSCO has become an ASPECT system phone site, minus a sensible plan to manage it. After negotiating with Chapter 247 for months to create a local ASPECT phone agreement, CSCO Management bailed out at the end of the bargaining process. The Operation Manager at the time, Frances Sorrow, told the Union that the Agency had taken away her power to negotiate locally.

"As with many of the initiatives rolled out in Compliance these days, the emphasis is on successful bean counting, not satisfying taxpayer service."

As past issues of *The Voice* have detailed, CSCO Management has since gone its own way, making up its own rules. It reinvents itself, one day at a time. Lacking the experience needed to bring off an orderly transition to a phone site environment, Management established a climate of panic which exists up to the current day.

CSCO has used the ASPECT system to track employee movement. While NTEU pacts—such as the Customer Service Operations Center (CSOC) agreement, and the Chapter 247-negotiated local agreement covering lunches and breaks—discourage technical surveillance of employees when they are not on the phones, CSCO doesn't make a distinction between answering the phone and inventory. The system supports a "Gotcha!" atmosphere that is petty,

punitive, and damaging to morale.

In fact, CSCO resembles the Wild, Wild West, and that mood is reflected in the unusually large number of grievances and EEO disputes. No relief has come from the succeeding Operations Manager, *Quinton Smith*. Quinton has been a spirited cheerleader for the failing status quo; but based on NTEU's observations of the many meetings, grievances, and briefings attended by both Management and the Union, it is our opinion that it is the Department Managers who have been calling the plays at CSCO.

Some positive results from all this chaos are a growing solidarity among employees and NTEU stewards, and increasing cooperation from CSCO's long-suffering first line managers, many of whom resent the soured atmosphere imposed upon them. Chapter 247 has continued to point out to upper management the obvious bond between disappointing business results and disappointed employees. Management seems to be getting the message, and the face of CSCO is changing. Two out of three Department heads have left recently. In fact, most employee problems now emanate from the one Department that has yet to experience a makeover. NTEU is hopeful that the remodeling of the Operation—whether undertaken by design, or as the result of serendipity-will bring an end to the plight of CSCO employees.

Pam Watson briefed Chapter 247 on her approach to "developing" managers by moving them to operations that they were unfamiliar with. These switcheroos directly resulted in the premature retirement of at least one talented Compliance Department Manager, and in a boost for some managers of dubious skill. This questionable policy is likely Pam's most lasting legacy.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

After all of this sound and fury and rearranging of deck chairs in Compliance, Pam left to sail upon a bigger pond as W&I Deputy Commissioner. It will be up to her successors to improve upon—or diminish—her record.

Compliance Director's Grade: B-

#### **ACCOUNTS MANAGEMENT**

Dick Auby is a disappointment, despite the low bar set by his predecessor, the memorably employee-toxic Charles Washington. While he was serving in his previous capacity as Austin's Compliance Director, The Voice labeled Dick the "Invisible Man" for his ability to remain out of sight while changes were being implemented all around him. As far as employees—and NTEU—are concerned, Auby's move to Accounts Management has resulted in even less visibility. After all, even the fictional Invisible Man sometimes appeared to the naked eye, which only served to heighten the tension caused by his disappearances. Although employees may consider it a good thing that Dick could not carry off the Drama King role as consummately as Charles did, the lack of a public persona has lent a faceless quality to the never-ending and frequently baffling changes in the workplace.

Some history here. When the current leadership of Chapter 247 took over more than five years ago, the Compliance operations were headed by officials whom NTEU considered to be extremely hostile to employees and to the Union. Over time, as the Chapter intensified its pressure on the existing Management chain, the head of Compliance, Dick Auby, replaced those Operations Chiefs with more reasonable and cooperative leaders who learned to deal with NTEU. So while Dick may not have been generally accessible to employees or to the Union, he was apparently savvy enough to delegate responsibilities to Operations Chiefs who were.

The problem with Accounts Management is that years of Charles Washington's leadership has resulted in a management chain of Charles clones valued more for their loyalty to the Big "C" and an anti-employee ethic than for their competence and evenheadedness. Put bluntly, Dick's tendency to farm out responsibilities to others could not succeed when the only candidates left behind to run AM Management's asylum are the head inmates, devoted to the old regime.

"The sky is high, and the emperor far away." - Chinese adage

Below the Operations level, however, Accounts Management's energy level for conflict seems to be diminishing, as Management coasts on the last bit of Charles-brand venom in its fuel tank. Without a micromanaging "Emperor" to watch over this domain, the stranglehold on employees cannot be sustained forever. Thus the Chapter has encountered more responsiveness and quicker success from AM managers in the area of individual employee concerns. Most managers don't have the appetite for harassing employees, and many are frank in conceding that they have even less of a desire to come up against Chapter 247.

Nevertheless, Accounts Management remains the worst place to work (see related story on page 4), and the unending changes in working conditions are imposed by Management without the notification and negotiations required by law. AM enjoys this Bad Boy reputation across the IRS, and whether or not the environment will eventually be transformed due to the "new attitude" articulated by Linda Stiff and other top Agency officials, the turnaround is slow in coming.

Having spent one seemingly comatose year as the head of Austin's Accounts Management, Dick Auby has now retired from the Agency, leaving

the hard work of relieving workplace turmoil to his successors. Don't forget, it was Dick who first banned the Union from team meetings while serving as Compliance Director.

According to Management sources, Dick stood up at the annual Compliance Leadership Conference the previous year and crowed that his managers needn't worry about grievances or EEO charges, that they should exclude NTEU from employee team meetings, and he would handle any blowback from the Union.

Bawk! Bawk! Bawk!

Despite the cocksure posture, Dick clucked when Chapter 247 began filing over every single team meeting where it was banned. After his chutzpah at the Leadership Conference, Auby failed to show up for even one grievance hearing; instead, he sent surrogates to face the Union in his place.

"After his chutzpah at the Leadership Conference, Dick Auby failed to show up for even one grievance hearing; instead, he sent surrogates to face the Union in his place."

When he took over at Accounts Management, Dick peevishly rolled out his ban to that Directorate. Again, he delegated the responsibility of cleaning up the clutter to his staff.

With such an easy-going agenda, why would anyone need to retire from such a job? And who would notice if they did?

As when Charles left the gig, there was no gala event where AM employees could share their appreciation for Dick's service to the Campus. Neither was the Union invited. Only a very

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10)

exclusive clientele of Dick devotees received the nod. The score? Two Directors in a row—evidently allergic to employees and to NTEU—exiting virtually in the dead of night.

Chapter 247 believes that no Director's performance is so low that he or she cannot be redeemed tomorrow or the next day. But Dick's time ran out. NTEU cannot whitewash what we see as a La-Z-Boy approach to managing. Farewell, Dick, we hardly knew ye.

#### AM Director's Grade: F

Despite the low scores, there is hope for the future—but that hope is due more to sympathetic political trends than good will on the part of local Management.

What about Linda Stiff, who since that day in Washington when she predicted a smoother relationship between NTEU and Management, was promoted temporarily to the IRS's top spot?

The sweet talk in April has come up against Management's actions since. The Agency unlawfully attempted to force National NTEU to the table to negotiate over proposals that would grant Management the exclusive right to decide whether or not an employee would be allowed an Alternative Work Schedule, and to assign Tours Of Duty as it saw fit. Chapter 247 President Eddie Walker served on the national Compliance AWS bargaining committee. Eddie and the rest of the Union team resisted the Agency's intemperate efforts to pry AWS from the hands

of employees. As NTEU predicted, an arbitrator eventually shut down all AWS negotiations, a decision that fortified the rights of the Union and the sanctity of labor/management agreements.

What is more important to today's federal employees and their families than flexible work schedules? And for call site workers in Accounts Management and ACS, which agreement has done more to support employees in their desire for a bearable working environment than the Customer Service Operations Center (CSOC) agreement? Linda Stiff's heralded, touchy-feely IRS has reopened that agreement for negotiations, and its proposals—like those for AWS—totally eviscerate that document and its employee protections.

As mentioned above, Chapter 247 has been a key mover in fighting the curtailment of Inventory Days in ACS. When the Agency sought to sneak around National NTEU by neglecting to notify the Union and failing to negotiate in good faith on the cutbacks, 247 called NTEU Headquarters, which filed a national grievance. Chapter 247 provided information and sent a witness to Washington for the grievance hearing. When an arbitrator sided with the Union against the IRS, the Agencyas it has done with other recent wins by NTEU-chose to appeal the decision and delay a solution for as long as possible.

Further, the Agency was so eager to end NTEU's successful boycott of the

IRS employee survey that it finally surrendered its intransigence and negotiated an agreement with the Union. When it comes to recording team concerns onto its Engagement Strategy Tracker computer program for resolution, however, Management refuses to share that information with NTEU. How cooperative is that?

So where is the improvement in NTEU/Management relations that Linda Stiff promised so many months ago? It does not exist. Although high level IRS leadership may be rapidly attriting (see related story on page 3), the current Honchos are in no mood to change—at least voluntarily. As always, it is the willingness of NTEU to fight—not the willingness of Management to compromise—that brings about change.

"Though the mills of God grind slowly, they grind exceedingly small." - Winston Churchill

As Churchill counseled us, when the pendulum finally swings in favor of justice, the victory is sweet indeed. In response to NTEU's lobbying, Congress has taken up the Union's proposal to bring labor/management partnership back to the federal government. And when that legislation passes, Congress won't be asking Management if it wants to be partners with the Union—it will be dispatching marching orders.

War is over? Certainly it is—if Management wants it. But either way, NTEU is gaining ground. Victory is coming, and coming soon.

I was out sick on Monday.

My manager said that I'm paid to be on the phone, not to hang around poolrooms!

I don't even play pool!! She said that I need a doctor's note, and it better be a legitimate doctor!!!



Your manager's the one who's sick! If you're not on a leave letter, the contract says that you are only required to provide a doctor's note if you're out sick for more than 3 days (Article 34, Sec. 3). You need to talk to NTEU.

Doofus and Darling

# I WENT TO THE NEW YORK CONVENTION...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

occasion summons up yet another coincidence—Victor's is located within a couple of blocks of the Sheraton.

The party is a glorious success. We have booked the lounge area, and are serving nine—yes, nine—types of Cuban Hors D'oeuvres.

I travel from table to table, answering questions and laying out my platform. Delegates and their spouses squeeze in and out of the lounge. The turnout exceeds our expectations. We make converts, including a few that we didn't bargain on.

Victor's Café is a hip setting, the perfect venue for visitors who want to experience the city, but don't want to stray far from the hotel without a tour guide.

Following the Victor's party, we open up our Hospitality Suite in the Sheraton. It doubles as a campaign headquarters; it is spacious and accommodating, with windows that run the length of the suite and afford a first-rate view of midtown New York

One of our supporters has donated official campaign CDs, with a jazz music mix assembled by a professional DJ, who also took the time to record an Eddie for President voiceover. Visitors to the suite receive a copy. (I continue to get rave reviews from delegates who have taken the crowd-pleasing, upbeat music home to entertain at their own parties.)

The pre-Convention kickoff scores. Our HQ is not only a convenient staging area, it is becoming a gathering place for NTEU Chapter Leaders, who will discuss the issues and the outlook for our organization late into the night. It is an exciting prospect, that in the NTEU of the future, these types of

brainstorming sessions might become not just a campaign event, but the standard for union leaders.

#### Monday, August 6

The Convention officially begins.

As we expected, our opponents have begun distributing giant-sized campaign buttons. We are ready for them.

Our team stations itself outside the ballroom, where delegates begin to trickle, then pour in. My volunteers hand out a bright yellow flyer with the title, "Support Eddie. Wear a Colleen Button."

The text continues: "We know that many of you believe that a secret ballot election should be just that—secret. And many have told us that they do not like being pressured to wear a campaign button that cancels out the meaning of a secret ballot.

\*The EDDIE for President Campaign is therefore requesting delegates committed to Eddie to accept any *Colleen* button that is offered to you and wear it.

This will signify that you are voting for Eddie Walker for NTEU National President. Or maybe not.

The point is: a NTEU national election is meant to be a secret ballot election. And we intend to keep it that way.

"So support EDDIE WALKER for President. Wear a Colleen button."

Those who appreciate clever campaign tactics think this is amusing. Regardless, it works. For whatever reason, there is no intimidating sea of buttons for the incumbent.

Our side has less traditional campaign gear to parcel out. For instance, as my team lobbies the crowd, they hand each delegate a guitar pick, which is translucent electric blue and has "Pick Eddie" printed on it. (This ties in with my online biography, which reveals a professional history in music and includes downloads of my songs.)

My crew also shleps around a portable DVD player, so that they can conveniently play my campaign video for any delegate they encounter.

Today's big happenings are the nomination and seconding speeches. The speeches are made by our supporters, not by the candidates, and this is where events prove that "the power of incumbency" is not an empty phrase. As a candidate. I don't get a shot at addressing the full Convention. In their roles as President and Executive Vice President, however, Colleen and Frank are able to use their welcoming remarks to the delegates to spread their message. Coincidently, there appears to be a record number of awards bestowed on Chapter Leaders, which can't help but aim the spotlight on the presenters, as well as those honored.

Our side has its assets, however. Making full use of our campaign headquarters, we are able to schedule get-togethers with groups of delegates throughout the day, while the nights are reserved for our open houses. Although, as a candidate for National President, I have received the official list that details how many votes each Chapter has, we accurately estimated the numbers long ago. Thus, as we lobby the delegates, we know just how many votes they represent.

This evening, NTEU holds an official cocktail reception in the hotel. Conspicuously, this year's party features a loud rock band, which

### I WENT TO THE NEW YORK CONVENTION...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

renders efforts to chat up voters useless. Rather than blow out my voice, I use the face time with the delegates to invite them to our Hospitality Suite.

It is a late night. The future of the union is Topic One, and we continue the conversations until, as they say, "the last dog dies."

### Tuesday, August 7 Election Day

In the hallways outside the ballroom, my team hands out red,
white, and blue pens to all, inscribed with the quip, "Mark your
ballot for Eddie." Perched on easels in the ballroom are huge, fullcolor posters of me, appealing to
delegates to "Vote Eddie Walker
for NTEU National President," and
promising "More Support, Greater
Teamwork, Better Communication...That's NTEU Plus!"

This morning is dominated by the caucuses, which, as far as accessibility to the delegates is concerned, comprise perhaps the most even-handed aspect of the campaign process. Each candidate will rotate appearances throughout five different rooms, addressing five groups of delegates, organized by District, face to face in five twenty-minute sessions each. No staff is allowed, and no candidates appear together.

I plunge headlong into the first caucus, bypassing the chance to open up with a speech, and offering myself up instead for Q & A. Within that format, I find the opportunity to make most of my points. In fact, I have a blast.

Believe it or not, some audience members are plants, there to ask the tough questions that the other side hopes will stump the candidate. You can tell which are the plants, because their questions are almost identical in each caucus—and because they follow a theme

which plays to the other candidate's strength. If you expect these things, it's not a problem. The whole process is probably a lot less nerve wracking than if I had to compete for Double Jeopardy on national television.

We come to the end of Caucus Number 5. There is only a short time before the balloting begins, and the question is: Is there anything left to be done?

My team has laid out my official, red, white, and blue brochures, packed with color photographs, in front of every delegate's spot, on every table in the ballroom, where the voting will take place. The effect is very striking visually. The other side counters by burying the brochures under their campaign flyers. My crew protests, which results in a fair and equitable spacing out of both sides' literature.



Team Eddie has moved the easels with my posters on them inside the ballroom, which leads to an assault on their presence by NTEU staffers. My guys successfully assert that, per the rules, the easels can stay inside until the voting commences.

When the secret balloting begins, no campaigning is permitted within the ballroom. Activity in the hall is bustling, however, as National Executive VP Frank Ferris makes himself available for photo opportunities with the delegates.

After the voting, NTEU Election Committee members leave the

ballroom with the ballot boxes. Both sides are granted their observers who tag along for the counting.

I am standing in the hallway down from the ballroom when my observer reemerges with the results. All parties return to the hall to receive the official tally.

#### **Count Me Out**

As reported in the Washington Post, Thursday, August 9, 2007 —

"Delegates to the 51st national convention of the National Treasury Employees Union have reelected the union's two top leaders to their third terms.

"Colleen M. Kelley, the union president, defeated Eddie Walker, head of NTEU Chapter 247 in Austin, with 84 percent of the vote."

At least *The Post* spells my name right. It is the first time that that august media outlet records the activities of Chapter 247, Austin, Texas.

Back in the hall, I walk across the ballroom to shake Colleen's hand. Well-wishers, supporters and non-supporters, laden me with encouragement.

Still, the rumors fly. The next day, a NTEU staffer tut-tuts to a member of my team that "Eddie left town right after the vote." My backer points to a spot ten feet away and correctly advises, "He's standing right there."

Of course, we stay for the entire Convention, "until the last dog dies." With the cessation of campaign efforts, there is finally a little time for sightseeing on my old turf. When we drop in at the NBC Store in Rockefeller Center, I choose as a souvenir of my New York visit a tee shirt from my favorite television program—a show about campaigning and governing—The West Wing. It will have to do.

# I WENT TO THE NEW YORK CONVENTION, RAN FOR NATIONAL PRESIDENT, & ALL I GOT WAS THIS "WEST WING" T-SHIRT

**Eddie Walker** Chapter 247 President

#### Friday, August 3, 2007

I arrive in New York City, a town that once served as my base of operations. It was 1995 when I ended my eight year residence in this city and moved to Austin, Texas. Austin led to the IRS, and the IRS to NTEU Chapter 247, where the membership elected me their President in 2002.

It is due to this background that—as the popular advertisement goes—I love New York, and it is an agreeable coincidence that NTEU's 51st National Convention is being held here, in my old stomping grounds. It is an extraordinary coincidence that I am not just a delegate here in New York, but a candidate for NTEU National President.

More than 400 NTEU Chapter Leaders will be attending this Convention, at the New York Sheraton Hotel and Towers. Although the gathering ends at noon Thursday, Tuesday is D-Day for the Presidential contest, when—in a secret ballot—the delegates commit for real.

Chapter 247's voting delegation consists of three officials: our Executive Vice President, First Vice President, and myself. Unofficially, there are five Austinians along to support my campaign, including my wife, Laurie.

If all has gone according to plan, by now every NTEU Chapter will have been furnished with a five minute long DVD, where I speak directly to Chapter Leaders about my vision and platform; visited my Website, eddieforpresident.com, which displays my background and my program, and includes the five minute DVD: received at least one phone contact from my campaign volunteers or from myself: read the national NTEU Bulletin, which features a bio and photo of each candidate: and was the recipient of a number of flyers in the mail, as well as a full color brochure summarizing my platform. My slogan: "Taking it to the next level for NTFU."

Our team has arrived in advance of most of the delegates. The campaigning will become all consuming, but before it begins in earnest, there is another task that I have to complete first.

#### Saturday, August 4

The coincidences have not yet been exhausted. By a schedule constructed years before, this Convention marks Chapter 247's turn to host the Service Center Chapter Presidents meeting.

There are a dozen IRS Service Center Chapter Presidents representing NTEU nationwide; I happen to be one. The twelve Chapters rotate the honor of hosting the meetings, which are held roughly twice a year. National President Colleen Kelley and National Executive Vice President Frank Ferris always attend. That two candidates for the National Presidency will sit across the table from each other for hours, sharing hosting responsibilities, is an accident worthy of note.

It is my intention that no politics intrude on this assemblage. Per tradition, breakfast is served, buffet style—courtesy of Chapter 247. Colleen and Frank attend the entire session, and issues are addressed in the usual, businesslike fashion. Both candidates navigate the competitive waters with professionalism and grace.

The meeting ends. Immediately, the campaign begins.

#### Sunday, August 5

Delegates trickle in to the Sheraton. A bright lime green circular, evoking the color of "the world's greatest jito...complimentary with this flyer," has been mailed out the previous week, and my campaign staff presses copies on every delegate they spy strolling through the hotel. Tonight, Laurie and I are hosting a Pre-Convention "Special Cocktail Party...New York Style!" at Victor's Café, a Cuban restaurant that I remember well from my years in New York, and the

(Continued on page 12)

#### CHAPTER 247 OFFICERS

PRESIDENT Eddie Walker

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT Julia Miller

FIRST VICE PRESIDENT Russell Bokelman

> TREASURER Karen Lorch

SECRETARY Tonia Gilmore

Arlene Flores (Days) X0833 Tonia Gilmore (Swing) X1080 Mike Bunton (Nights)

**CHIEF STEWARDS** 



#### **STEWARDS**

X5732

PAUL BENAVIDES X5373 VALERIE BROOKS XD400

MONICA CAHILL X5435

DAVEDAVIS X0253

BEN EURESTE X1503

GAIL GANT XDD48

DEYSIGUERRERO X1106

WILLIE HINES X0390

TONYAJONES X0892

JUDY LACOUR XD430

MARLA MICADAMIS XD873

LADAN MAKKEDUK X1116

BLAS MARTINEZ X5370

ELIOLVERA X1194

MELVINTEALER X0217

ABRAHAM TORRES XD447

WES WALKER X1042

RAMONA WRIGHT XD991