# Union asks Senate to give TSA bargaining rights

*by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources*

WASHINGTON - The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) -- the nation's largest union of federal workers, including TSA employees -- says that bargaining rights and whistleblower protections for Transportation Security Officers (TSO) will actually help to improve homeland security. The union today urged members of the Senate to support an amendment offered by Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.) that provides basic worker rights and protections to the nearly 45,000 TSOs who help protect our airports and our nation.

On Feb. 15, the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee voted to include in its bill an amendment offered by Committee Chair Joseph Lieberman (I-Conn.) granting collective bargaining and other labor rights to TSOs. A floor vote on the matter is expected Tuesday afternoon.

"AFGE encourages every member of Senate to vote in favor of justice; in favor of fairness; and in favor of national security," AFGE National President John Gage said. "We thank Chairman Lieberman and Sen. McCaskill for their efforts and hope their colleagues will follow suit."

Senators who have argued that the bill legalizes a screener strike clearly are either misinformed or seek to misinform the public, says AFGE. It is illegal for any federal worker to strike, regardless of whether they belong to a union or are covered by a collective bargaining agreement. The same would be true for TSOs.

"The notion that granting bargaining rights to TSOs would result in a less flexible workforce is just plain nonsense and it is also an insult to the thousands of dedicated federal workers within Homeland Security, including the Border Patrol, FEMA, Federal Protective Service, and the Army Corps of Engineers," said AFGE National President John Gage. "One only need look at 9/11. Unionized workers from both the public and private sector were first on the scene and worked tirelessly to restore what had been. Having union rights did not hamper response time or the ability to do their jobs but instead it helped prepare them to be ready in case of emergency."

The lack of basic worker rights and persistent inadequate staffing have taken their toll on the TSA workforce. TSOs are subject to extensive unscheduled mandatory overtime, penalties for using accrued leave and constant

scheduling changes because of the failure of the TSA to hire adequate numbers of TSOs. As a result, TSA has among the highest injury, illness, lost time, and EEOC complaint rates in the federal government. In fiscal year 2006, TSA employees' injury and illness rates were close to 30 percent, far higher than the 5 percent average for other federal employees. The overall TSA attrition rate is more than 10 times that for federal civilian employees and upwards of 40 percent at some major airports.

"This continuing mistreatment of the TSO workforce hampers the ability of TSOs to do their jobs," Gage said. "As a result, the safety of the public and of the nation is jeopardized. The public will never receive the highly- trained, career security officer workforce it demands if TSOs are not granted these fundamental labor rights."

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