



The Public Employee

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, Local 1624
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JUNE 2004

AFSCME 2004 Scholarship Winners!

AFSCME Scholarship Committee interviewed six finalists who had applied for three available \$1000 scholarship awards.

After careful consideration the committee selected the following AFSCME members' children for awards:

Jessica Everton (daughter of AFSCME member Richard Everton)

Jessica is graduating from Bowie High School with a 3.2 GPA, with academic and athletic honors as an All-District soccer player.

Jessica's community service commitment was outstanding with 800+ hours serving at St. David's Hospital. Jessica's boundless energy and enthusiasm will serve her well as she pursues her degree at McMurry University.

Ashley Coleman (daughter of AFSCME member Darrell Coleman)

Ashley is graduating from Del Valle High School with an impressive 4.2 GPA. In addition to maintaining this academic excellence, Ashley was active in Varsity Soccer, Student Council, National Honor Society, Student Ambassador, and was acknowledged in Who's Who Among American High School Students. All the while, Ashley put in 130 hours of community volunteer work and held down **two** part-time jobs.

Ashley's determination and drive will undoubtedly propel her through the University of Texas San Antonio.

Mallonya Diggs (daughter of AFSCME member Melanie Diggs)

Mallonya is graduating from McCallum High School after overcoming several personal and physical challenges, which would have set back most students.

Mallonya is very active in her church where she serves as Youth President. Mallonya speaks to groups of teens about the problems of teen pregnancy, drop-out rates, relationships and suicides. Her message is: the way to stay on track is with God's Word. Mallonya will study Culinary Arts at Texas State Technical Institute towards a career in the Hospitality Industry.

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Major Progress on Personnel Policies Revisions

-AFSCME's Recommendations Accepted-

For over a year now AFSCME has been engaged in the revisions to the City's Personnel Policies. Our interest initially was to bring consistency to the Policies and have them applied equitably among the various departments.

When we viewed the initial Policy changes being proposed we were more than concerned- we were, in fact, alarmed at the many changes proposed which included:

- Future Personnel Policy amendments **without** City Council approval.
- Programs and benefits such as: Wage Continuation, Service Incentive Pay, Terminal Pay, Sick and Vacation Leave accrual, etc. were **eliminated** from Policy. This would have allowed for future changes or elimination at the sole discretion of Management.
- Most references to employee rights and protections were **eliminated**.

We were adamantly opposed to these changes and feared that a policy confrontation was inevitable given the vast differences between our and the City's position.

We were very pleased, however, when we viewed the **latest revisions** to the Policies. **Fully 95% of our concerns were addressed.** The City **put back** into the **Personnel Policies** the rights, protections, benefits and due process we insisted upon. They also put back the language that called for City Council approval of any Personnel Policy amendments. In short, your rights and interests have been secured.

Positive changes that have been made include:

- City has dropped current policy of disallowing sick leave if employee cannot show proof of proper use of sick leave (doctor's note requirement) (AFSCME argues this should only be a requirement after employee shows pattern of abuse)

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AFSCME Local 1624 Scholarship Winners continued....

Other applicants were equally impressive. They all exhibited the commitment and heart which will serve them well in their lives. These applicants included:

Angela Tisdale (daughter of James Tisdale)
Brittney Watters (daughter of Ronnie Edwards)
Mahalia Revetta (daughter of Richard Revetta)

AFSCME extends our congratulations to all these fine young adults who give us hope for a better future.

Congratulations also to these students' parents. We know this is the result of your hard work, dedication and love and you should be very proud. We certainly are.

Personnel Policies Revisions continued....

Issues still in need of address include:

- Wage Supplement with Serious Injury Supplemental Benefits (Current proposed language gives HRD authority to adopt, amend or terminate the program at any time.)
- **Pre-termination meetings** with Department Director becoming an option
- Employee's **intellectual property rights** in regards to off- the- job inventions or ideas.
- **Reporting of all outside employment** and department given sole discretion to approve or not

The revised Policies still must pass through the City Manager's Office and the City Council for approval

AFSCME will be engaged in this process every step of the way to ensure that these Personnel Policies are in **your best interest**.

We want to acknowledge the hard work of **HRD staff** members who have worked with us to achieve these agreements. Using an **interest-based bargaining** approach we were able to work through our many concerns.

We will next focus on the Procedures attendant to these policies. We have learned that an otherwise good policy can be rendered useless by onerous procedures. We will also examine programs like the **Return to Work Program** with the intent of improving them. Thanks also to our **AFSCME leadership and members** whose input proved very valuable to our efforts.

New Hospital District Established

-AFSCME Moves to Secure Employee's Jobs-

Behind the public debate surrounding the establishment of a Travis County Hospital District there were **major implications** for City and County Health and Human Services Department (HHSD) employees.

The City and County employees involved could have **lost their current positions** if they were to become Hospital District employees. The same could have occurred if a Private Non-Profit Agency was established to run the District. In either case the employees would have been **forced to leave** their City/County jobs in order to work for the District.

We learned from bitter experience what can happen when employees transition over to a new entity. We remembered how **Brackenridge** employees fared badly in the transition over to the Seton Healthcare system, and we were not about to let the same thing happen to our HHSD members and employees.

AFSCME was intent on securing the future employment, pay, benefits and retirement of these HHSD employees.

AFSCME pushed for a joint **City/County Resolution** that directed staff to ensure that these employees would remain **under contract as City and County employees** working for the Hospital District. Our concern was also directed at the impact to our Retirement Fund if 300+ employees were forced out of the system. It could have had a **devastating impact on future retirement benefits** for all City/County employees.

Working directly with Council member **Betty Dunkerley** and City and County attorneys, AFSCME crafted the **Resolution** which provides for the immediate and long-term security of the employees involved.

The City Council and Commissioners Court **unanimously approved** this Resolution and in the process brought security to many worried employees.

Our many thanks to **Council Member Dunkerley** for her intervention and leadership in addressing this important issue.

Pay Raises and Healthcare Benefits – A Continuing Tug of War

In meetings with City Manager, Toby Futrell, AFSCME has been assured that a pay raise will be included in the 2004-2005 Budget.

This pay raise is contingent upon several factors however, including:

- Keeping a lid on Police and Fire Safety premium pay.
- The City Council adopting the effective tax rate.
- Keeping our healthcare premiums in check.

It is our **Healthcare** benefits and the escalating costs of premiums that is proving **most challenging**.

As a member of the Benefits Advisory Committee, AFSCME was intent on seeing **no reductions** to the current plan benefits such as: copays, deductibles, and coinsurance rates.

Major changes were made last year which resulted in increased copays, deductibles, etc. These changes among others have kept a relative lid on our overall healthcare costs, yet we are still facing a **15% increase** in our premiums.

This amounts to approximately a **\$6.5 million** increase for 2004-2005.

The Benefits Advisory Committee's final recommendations, which we have forwarded to City Administration for review, include:

- No Health plan benefit reductions
- Require transplant participants to utilize "Centers of Excellence" to receive in-network benefits
- Remove age-rated limitations for physicians under UHC Choice Plus plan
- Increase annual Dental maximum benefit from \$1200 to \$1500

- Six month waiting period for new employees to be eligible for Short -Term Disability benefits
- Dependent coverage premiums will increase by approximately 15%

AFSCME will be lobbying the City Managers Office and the City Council to **absorb these increases as the cost of doing business**.

We believe that we can still maintain a 3 ½ % pay increase for City employees in the process. **It boils down to a question of priorities.**

Having gone without a pay increase for two years and with the health benefit reductions of last year, we contend that **employees** should be the **first** consideration this year.

AFSCME is also lobbying that the **pay increase** be **effective October 1st** instead of the usual January 1st effective date.

We are further pushing for a lifting of the "freeze" on **reclassifications and market studies** that have been pending for years.

As always, the upcoming budget deliberations will be challenging, but with some creativity and focus, we should be able to afford employees with some **well-earned pay increases** and affordable healthcare coverage.

Grievance Update

Filed re: SWS employee terminated two weeks before Christmas. Employee had previously filed an approved FMLA for his work-related injury. FMLA leave time as well as many hours of sick and vacation time available at time of termination ignored by department.

Results: Grievance Hearings Officer agreed that termination should be overturned and recommended reinstatement with full back-pay and benefits.

City Manager concurs; reinstates employee with four month's back-pay and full benefits.

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Guest Editorial: “An Open Letter to Non-believers”
- From An AFSCME Steward-

By now I am sure everyone is aware of the lucrative contract the police association has obtained from the City. Surely everyone is also aware of the passage of the collective bargaining initiative for the firefighters with the City. These are both great accomplishments that will benefit those employees for many years to come. Most of the credit goes to the associations (unions) that enjoy nearly 100% support of the employees through dues-paying membership in these organizations.

AFSCME has about 25% of eligible employees that demonstrate their support through their dues-paying membership in the union and their willingness to get involved and make a difference. Of course, the victories and gains AFSCME obtains on behalf of its members flow over to the rest of the workforce even though 75% are taking the free ride on the efforts and involvement of their fellow workers.

Many of our active members have been trying diligently to increase the membership in AFSCME by encouraging and educating non -members to the advantages that would be gained by all employees.

Every one of you, whether you are a new employee or have ten or twenty years of service, who join and drop or never join the union are keeping us from attaining this goal. You non-members say “I don’t see why I need the union”, “why should I pay, let others do it”, “what has the union done for me”, “I don’t believe in unions”, etc. You are the reason we can’t get agreements with management for wage and benefit gains like police and fire employees are enjoying. You are saying, in effect, that you are content with this.

You think you are getting over because whatever AFSCME is able to win for our members is also given to you. By not showing your support for our efforts, by joining and contributing your share, you diminish the power of numbers to pressure management on your behalf. You won’t make this investment and then you complain because Police and Fire workers are getting much more than the majority of the workforce.

Wake up, you are being “penny wise and pound foolish”. As long as you have this attitude you will get the left-overs from management while Police and Fire enjoy the feast.

Rethink your attitude. When you are approached to join AFSCME sign the card, stay in for a few years, support and contribute to the union. In that period of time, if we have 40%, 50%, 75% of eligible workers in the union, you will a dramatic difference in the results of the efforts made by AFSCME on **your** behalf. Who else is advocating for you?

Think about it. The difference is about making demands of management instead of begging and hoping.