

P R E S S R E L E A S E

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 8, 2021

Contact: communication@afgenvac.org

Largest Veterans Affairs Department Union Overwhelmingly Votes Against Ratifying Collective Bargaining Agreement

--

Union members call for VA to come back to the table and bargain in good faith to ensure employees and veterans are protected as COVID-19 cases continue to surge

WASHINGTON -- The American Federation of Government Employees National Veterans Affairs Council (AFGE NVAC), which represents over 265,000 employees at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), announced on Friday that its membership had voted overwhelmingly against ratifying a partial tentative collective bargaining agreement. The vote was taken under protest following the VA's illegal insistence that members ratify a partial agreement. This month, the parties are set to return to the bargaining table with the assistance of a mediator.

"It is our belief that our membership would vote to ratify an agreement bargained in good faith," said **AFGE NVAC President Alma Lee** in her [letter](#) to **Michael Picerno, Acting Executive Director, Office of Labor Management Relations at the Department of Veterans Affairs**. "As the entirety of the Department's conduct during negotiations failed to meet the bare minimum requirements of good faith, we respectfully request that the Department return to the table in complete reversal of its prior conduct."

The failed ratification comes after the November 5 [decision](#) from a Trump appointed Federal Service Impasses Panel (FSIP) to impose many of the VA's anti-worker contract proposals on VA employees as the agency struggles to keep pace with a third wave of the coronavirus pandemic. Members of the AFGE NVAC have been [fighting for a fair contract for years](#), demanding safe working conditions and adequate staffing levels, the space and equipment VA workers need to ensure veterans receive the best care possible, and mechanisms to protect workers from the whims of management.

However, the panel's decision cannot legally be implemented by the VA at this time. The legitimacy of the panel's ruling is still in question because of a controversy about the constitutionality of the members' appointments, which will be resolved by the courts. Likewise, nine articles from the parties' existing contract are the subject of a separate lawsuit in federal court. While VA members await the resolution of these matters, the FSIP decision is not in effect. Attempts by the VA to implement any part of the FSIP decision would be illegal.

The VA's years-long campaign to impose an anti-worker contract on hundreds of thousands of its employees could be [reversed by the Biden administration](#). Biden will have the power to encourage the negotiation of a fair VA contract, bargain in good faith, and rescind Trump's controversial VA executive orders, which Biden has prioritized on day one of his presidency to [restore the rights of government workers to unionize](#).

"This failed ratification vote sends a loud and clear message to the VA that our members will not settle for an unfair contract," said **Linda Ward-Smith, president of AFGE Local 1224 in Las Vegas**. "The VA continues to undermine the union's right to an equitable contract and ability to negotiate. Until they can come back to the table and fairly reach a

1970 Roanoke Blvd.
Building 76 Suite 106
Roanoke, VA 24153

Phone: 540-345-6301
Fax: 540-342-2196

AFGE National VA Council



new contract, our members will not back down and continue to fight for protections that we are entitled to under the law in order to maintain a standard of care for our veterans, while ensuring employees can safely do their jobs.”

The importance of a fair contract is a matter of life and death during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has claimed the lives of [105 VA employees](#) and over [7,000 veterans](#). Currently, more than [14,000 VA employees](#) and [130,000 veterans](#) have tested positive.

###