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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 31, 2021

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EVENT AT 4:00PM

Leavenworth Veterans Affairs Union Members to Celebrate Return to Campus Following Biden's Reversal of Trump-Era Executive Orders

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*Celebration Comes Amidst a Years-Long Fight for a Fair Contract, as Union Signs Historic
Settlement Agreement With Biden Administration VA*

Leavenworth, Ks. - On Saturday, July 31, members of the American Federation of Government Employees' National VA Council (AFGE NVAC) - the union representing over 265,000 Veterans Affairs (VA) workers - AFGE Local 85 will unite for a ReUNION Celebration Event, honoring the VA workers who risked their lives on the front lines of the pandemic to care for our local veterans.

After years of AFGE NVAC members working tirelessly to defeat the union-busting policies of the previous administration, President Biden [reversed](#) the damage done by key Trump-era executive orders, including attacks on official time, space and disciplines. As a result, workers will also celebrate their return to campus.

The celebration will take place at Ray Miller Park and will feature family fun activities and prizes for union members and families alike.

WHAT: VA Workers ReUNION Celebration Event

WHEN: Saturday, July 31, 2021 - 4 to 8 p.m. CT

WHERE: Ray Miller Park

4103 S 4th St, Leavenworth, KS 66048

WHO: AFGE Local 85 members and their families
Local Community Supporters

Participating local AFGE members will be available on the ground for media interviews.

Last week, AFGE NVAC and the VA also finalized and signed a [historic settlement agreement](#), which will [solve](#) a number of the major issues VA workers have faced for years, including providing relief to front-line workers who have been denied access to their union representatives, restoring the union rights of VA health care professionals, and resetting the previously adversarial relationship between VA management and the unionized workforce -- a critical step toward good faith bargaining over a new collective bargaining agreement, which will be the largest public sector union contract in the United States when finalized.

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AFGE National VA Council



Members of AFGE NVAC have been [fighting for a fair contract for years](#), demanding safe working conditions and adequate staffing levels, the space and equipment they need to ensure veterans receive the best care possible, and mechanisms to protect workers from the whims of management.

The importance of a fair contract is a matter of life and death during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has claimed the lives of over [145 VA employees](#) and over [12,567 veterans](#) - making it deadlier for American veterans than the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars combined. Instead of listening to VA workers when they raised the alarm about PPE shortages at the start of the pandemic, Secretary Wilkie and VA officials dismissed them and only acknowledged the shortages once [internal memos were leaked](#).

In January 2021 - nine months into the pandemic - AFGE NVAC released the results of a nationwide survey that revealed the VA has grossly mishandled its COVID-19 response, putting both VA workers and veterans nationwide at risk of contracting the virus. Notably, [60% of respondents](#) reported that their facility did not alert them when fellow staff members contracted COVID-19 and nearly 50% of respondents stated that they were not notified prior to working with COVID-19 positive patients. VA workers need a strong contract in order to protect themselves during future pandemics and national crises of this nature.

In addition to the COVID-19 related issues that VA workers face, AFGE released the [results of a 2020 nationwide survey](#) that revealed rampant racism at the VA going unchecked under Secretary Robert Wilkie, who was appointed by President Donald Trump amid controversy over Wilkie's longtime membership in the [Sons of Confederate Veterans](#). Notably, the survey found that 78% of respondents reported that systemic racism is a moderate or serious problem at the VA. And in October, the union obtained [hiring data](#) that show white employees who applied for management positions were selected at double the rate of Black VA workers.

The severity of these surveys exposing systemic racism at the VA are compounded by the fact that Secretary Wilkie helped lead a broad campaign by the Trump administration to bring [federal employees to heel](#) by undermining their union. The survey caught the attention of Senators Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and Brian Schatz (D-Hawai'i), who called on the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to [conduct an investigation into the VA](#) to determine the extent to which systemic racism has impacted the agency.

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