

# Weekly Word

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## Time Card Recording

Last week I alerted you that there was an issue with how time, especially overtime, was being counted. Some folks had their timecards changed and therefore lost some premium overtime pay.

We met with administration and Labor Relations yesterday and they have agreed to have workers to continue to complete timecards the way it has always been done. The only exception relates to workers who have claimed premium overtime during a week in which they used sick time. If you use any hours of sick time during a week of overtime work, then you lose those hours from computing overtime.

Human Resources will be reviewing timecards for the past two pay periods to see if proper compensation was given. DHS Personnel has kept a record of timecards that they changed. If you changed your timecard per directive by your supervisor, and it was thus submitted to Personnel incorrectly, you will need to get this straightened through your supervisors and then through Personnel.

Continue to email me if you have problems with getting the appropriate compensation for hours worked.

## Meeting with Maggie

After the August County Leg meeting, which followed our last rally in front of Maggie's window, I had a chance to talk with Maggie Brooks about some issues. One issue related to the rally. I had invited her to speak at our rally but she had declined, stating she would rather have an opportunity to have a meaningful dialogue with members. At that point she offered to meet with the Executive Board of the Federation. That meeting was last Friday.

One thing I had wanted out of the meeting was for Maggie to state to the board, as she has stated to me on numerous occasions, her belief that we have a very dedicated, hard-working group of employees that she appreciates for the job that is done. She recognizes the extraordinary work that is being done under terrible conditions and is committed to trying to make our work life more manageable. She also, however, underscored that the County budget problems makes it hard to make corrections easy to do, since all departments she has responsibility for are working understaffed and crying for help.

All of your board members had an opportunity to explain the hardships that are evident in their work areas, and did a remarkable job in representing your interests. We talked for over two hours and spent a considerable amount of time on DHS administration, promotional appointments that were made, the mileage reimbursement impact on field workers, how to work towards a more cooperative environment, the contract stalemate, potential privatization of Day Care Registration and Compliance, and even the potholes at St Paul. The meeting ended around 2:20 and, believe it or not, the potholes were filled by that afternoon's end. Over the weekend (I think) an announcement was made that IRS had increased the mileage reimbursement through the end of the year, though I'm not sure Maggie was an influence in that. By the end of Monday morning, a negotiations meeting was set with Dick Mackey and Brayton Connard for the following day. The other issues are still works in progress.

Please take a moment to send an email to Maggie to thank her for coming and listening to the executive board and for helping each of them to better understand the County's sentiment and concerns. Thank her also for being, I believe, the first County Executive who has taken time to sit down with a bargaining unit that has been under a lot of stress for multiple years. While you're at it...thank your brothers and sisters on the executive board for having this frank dialogue with "the Boss." This took a lot of courage to act in an arena they are not used to acting in. Of course, I knew they would perform well and felt comfortable putting them in this position.

## Contract Update

Some of you have pointed that there hasn't been much contract update in these pages lately. I do apologize for that, but hopefully I will be able to report some positive news.

Our last formal meeting with the County negotiators was around the end of April. Let me say that Jean Zimmer and I nearly walked out a couple of times. We were no closer to an agreement than we were 18 months before. At this time, I organized a meeting of the presidents of the other County Unions to see how everyone else was situated. Before our first meeting, CSEA announced their tentative agreement. This left six Unions still in some stage of negotiations, 16 months past the expiration of their contracts. The remaining presidents decided that we needed

to meet directly with Maggie Brooks to voice our concerns about the status and lack of progress of negotiations. We finally met with Maggie in late July.

The meeting with Maggie went very well as each president related roughly the same experience with the County negotiators. Each of us had declared impasse with the Public Employees Relations Board (PERB), but based on our own composition, were in varying stages with the impasse. For example, the Sheriff road patrol has binding arbitration, that none of the other units has completely or at all. Under PERB, our recourse is impasse, a process that neither mandates nor produces an agreement.

Subsequent to this, Jean Zimmer and I have had a couple of informal contract discussions with County administration to determine the sticking points and possible resolution. This includes the meeting this past Tuesday.

While we do not have a tentative agreement, I do believe we are getting much closer. I feel hopeful that a few more discussions will yield an agreement that will meet most of our needs. Because of this, I will be asking the Membership committee of the Federation to contact all people that appear on our membership roster as non-members to verify if they should be members, or believe that they are members. Unless you are listed as paying membership dues, you will not be able to attend a membership meeting on a contract vote, or be able to vote on any tentative agreement.

**I need to caution you boldly:**

- **There is no tentative agreement, no deal has been made.**
- **If a deal is made, I want you to be able to vote at a membership meeting on the proposed contract.**
- **You cannot vote on the contract if our roster provided by Monroe County does not have you listed as a member.**
- **Our membership committee will be contacting identified non-members to verify their membership.**

## **Rumors**

Rumors, as you may know, sometimes keep this bargaining unit going. In the past, there have been rumors, always from a “reliable” source, that portend what the future holds. Sometimes they are true, sometimes they have a hint of truth, and most times they are completely from left field.

There can be many reasons why people start or pass on rumors. Sometimes, the rumor passer feels they’ve been party to some secret and sharing gives some sort of power. Sometimes they are meant to discredit or “get even” with the subject of the rumor, something caseworkers experience when they investigate spite child protective referrals. Sometimes the creator of a rumor has a boring life and needs to create some excitement.

Frequently, any of these reasons can play a role. Unfortunately, the rumors are frequently destructive on a variety of levels.

Over the past few weeks, some rumors have been circulating around Westfall and St Paul regarding the recent IUE and CWA convention in Chicago. I feel saddened to have to address these rumors so publicly, but I’m more saddened to conceive the impact these rumors have had on a very fragile membership at a time when we need membership cohesiveness the most.

While I write very positive remarks about our current relationship with Monroe County, I do not ever forget that we have differing needs from County administration and we, and administration constantly fight for our needs. If the County suspects division within the membership, how does that affect our bargaining position on any issue, whether contract or grievance?

I need the support of the national Union in these very same discussions and spend considerable energy insuring that our leaders know who we are and why they need to attend to our issues. Remember...we are 850 out of 700,000 nationally, and one of the smaller units within the CWA structure. If they suspect dissent, where is my support for your issues?

And if I look to the future of this local Union, and train the leaders that will follow me so that they don’t have to learn from scratch how to meet the needs of the membership, but their training is discredited because the membership listens to unfounded rumors, how prepared will the future leadership be? How well will your future needs be met?

Hopefully from last week’s article by Michelle Alaimo, and the ones appearing in the next few issues of the Weekly Word, you will see the positive impact of participation in annual conventions. Hopefully you will agree that sending your co-workers and leaders to convention to learn the ropes, to learn how other locals have succeeded when faced with similar issues, to know who the “go to” people are, or to make contacts for when the inevitable new situation arises, that this is a worthwhile expense.

But most importantly, I hope you will take the time to ask questions of those who were in Chicago regarding the rumors rather than simply take them as fact. And if you still have concerns, raise your question to the executive board for redress, or higher if your concerns persist. That’s what democracy is all about. If concerned about your taxes, you raise the issue. It’s no different with how your dues are spent. But to disparage the work of the Union based solely on rumors, will only hurt you in the long run. Anyone who creates or passes these rumors without raising the question to the responsible entities discredits, destroys and undermines the work of many of co-workers who have sacrificed their own time into making this a better Union, including Mobilization committee members, who have met weekly for over a year to try to get a contract.