

# USDA Labor Management Forum

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October 28, 2015 Minutes

## I. ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS

The USDA Labor-Management Forum (LMF) Meeting was called to order at 1:05 p.m.

### Member Roll Call:

Labor and Designated Alternates:	Management and Designated Alternates:
Chris Ketner, AFSCME, Labor Co-chair	Bryan Knowles, DM, Management Co-Chair
Chris Berry, NFFE	William P. Milton, Jr., CHCO, DM
Johanna Eckley, NTEU	Dr. Gregory Parham, OSEC
Trina Liddell, AFSCME	Robyn Ford, FNCS
Rosalyn Livingston, AFGE	Kathy Hall, ARS
Ray Magee, NTEU	Marilyn Holland, APHIS
LaVerne Walker, AFSCME	Noreen Joice, FSA
Patrick Wicklund, AFSCME	Dan Kline, OHRM
	Jacqueline Myers, FSIS
	Steve Placek, NAD
	Edna Primrose, RD

**Other Attendees:** Diane Anderson-OHRM, Lisa Barnard-OHRM, James Brent-OHRM, Peter Brownell-APHIS, Jeana Harbison-GIPSA, Robin Heard-OSEC, Neha Hewitt-OGC, Kelley Jones-FS, Adrian Lindsey-OHRM, Chris Nelson-OBPA, Anika Patterson-ASCR, Duane Williams-OO, Walter Vick-FNCS

**Note Taker(s):** Debbie Clark, Myron Greenhow and Adrian Lindsey

## II. DISCUSSION

**Introduction:** **Bryan Knowles**, Employee and Labor Relations Division Director and USDA LMF Management Co-chair, called the meeting to order. All participants introduced themselves and **Knowles** asked speakers to identify themselves before speaking to assist note-takers. **Knowles** made a motion to accept the minutes of the July 22, 2015 USDA LMF Meeting; **Edna Primrose**, Rural Development Deputy Administrator for Management, seconded the motion. **Knowles** indicated they should be posted to the website within a week.

**Knowles** asked **Chris Ketner**, Labor Co-chair and American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Union Representative, if he had anything to start. He did not, so **Knowles** moved to the first agenda item.

**Update on the National Academy of Public Administration's (NAPA's) Report on the potential Under Secretary for Trade:** **Knowles** introduced **Chris Nelson**, Special Assistant to the ASA, for an update on the NAPA study of the proposed reorganization of international trade functions for imports and exports of the USDA. **Nelson** thanked the Forum for inviting him and provided a brief summary of actions that have led to the current status. The 2014 Farm Bill included a directive for the Secretary to propose a reorganization of international trade functions for imports and exports of the USDA and the 2015 Appropriations Act provided funding for NAPA to conduct a study toward that end. Over the past 10 months, NAPA has been conducting the study and performing an analysis about potentially creating a new Under Secretary with a focus on trade. As part of the study, NAPA interviewed a number of stakeholders both internal and external to the USDA. When the study was completed, the results were documented and sent to the NAPA panel for review. That review has been done and their findings and recommendations were published on the NAPA website last week. **Nelson** stated the panel recommended three changes to the USDA organizational structure—creating a Trade and Market Development mission area to include FAS and trade-related components of AMS and GIPSA, putting FSIS and APHIS together in a mission area for Health and Safety, and moving FSA, RMA and the domestic components of AMS and GIPSA into a Farm Services and Risk Management mission area. **Nelson** commented that FSIS and APHIS were previously together as a mission area in the 1990's. **Nelson** stated the bottom line is that a reorganization of this magnitude would be substantial and take years, and USDA policy officials are not necessarily of the opinion to do so at this time. This was a third-party study and has not yet been embraced by the USDA as the way ahead. The Secretary is committed to reviewing the recommendations and may possibly have a separate internal study conducted. Although there is an interest in the current Administration about trade, it may not be addressed considering the time remaining for this Administration. **Nelson** stated the study results should not cause immediate, short-term impact within the USDA. **Ketner** asked **Nelson** for clarification about whether there would be a new Under Secretary position, since the last time this was proposed, they were not sure. **Nelson** indicated there is a question about whether there is a legal authority for creating a new Under Secretary position; therefore, the study is recommending changes that keep the same number of Under Secretary positions (7) rather than adding one. **Ketner** asked if the study will now just sit for a while, to which **Nelson** stated completion of the study meets the requirements of the Farm Bill, but the Secretary may want to conduct a separate internal study. **Knowles** asked whether the study was provided to Congress; **Nelson** responded that NAPA did present it to Congress without anyone accompanying them. **William "Billy" Milton, Jr.**, USDA Chief Human Capital Officer, asked **Nelson** to ensure copies get sent out to everyone; **Nelson** indicated the study is available on the NAPA website under the Reports area. **Nelson** concluded his presentation by informing the group to address any future questions to him through **Knowles** or **Myron Greenhow**, Labor Relations Specialist.

**Personnel Announcement from Dr. Gregory Parham:** There was a brief diversion from the agenda as **Knowles** introduced **Dr. Gregory Parham**, the USDA Assistant Secretary for Administration, to say a few words to the Forum members and attendees. **Dr. Parham**

announced **Milton** is going to retire at the end of the year, and will be coming to his office before that time as part of the transition. **Dr. Parham** commended **Milton** for his service, bringing ideas and resources from across the federal government to the table, as well as a passion to his position that is supported by a depth and breadth of experience. **Dr. Parham** lauded **Milton** for putting head and heart together, while being a champion of change and “emperor of engagement.” **Milton** conveyed his thanks to everyone and stated it’s been a good 6 years—USDA has one of the most effective LM councils in the federal sector and he is proud of its efforts. **Milton** stated this forum was the first one recognized by OPM, and while he wishes funding was still the same as in the beginning, it’s been a good run. **Milton** indicated this decision is bittersweet and ended his comments by thanking everyone for the opportunity. **Knowles** expressed his thanks to **Milton**, noting how things have changed since he first came to table where **Johanna Eckley**, National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) Chapter 226 President, now sits. Subsequently, **Knowles** introduced **James Brent**, OHRM Program Manager for Employee Engagement, to address the next item on the agenda.

**2015 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) Results:** **Brent** indicated the FEVS results have been released and all agency POCs have received them. They have been posted to the USDA web site and they are also accessible at the OPM web site [unlocktalent.gov](http://unlocktalent.gov). **Brent** stated there were five major indices on the survey—Employee Engagement, Global Satisfaction, New IQ, My Agency, and Leadership, with 46 total questions making up these five indices. The USDA increased in each of the indices, and is equal to or exceeded each of the indices when compared across the government. According to **Brent**, there was a 66.2% participation rate in the USDA, which was 16.5% higher than the government-wide average, and the USDA scored higher on 64 of 71 questions compared to last year. Although this is a positive trend, **Brent** indicated there are aggressive goals for 2016—some are set for us by others, i.e., OMB and OPM, and some we establish for ourselves. He stated there were many compliments on our work in the USDA from OPM and OMB. **Brent** mentioned we are still waiting on the response/results from OPM regarding the questions from the Union on the FEVS. **Ketner** asked why that part is taking longer, to which **Brent** indicated he is not aware of the reason for the delay—he followed up again this morning and is still waiting for a response. **Knowles** asked if there were any further questions or concerns; hearing none, he asked **Brent** to proceed to the next agenda topic.

**Veterans Retention Project Plan:** **Brent** informed the attendees that OHRM has been tasked by **Dr. Parham** to lead a USDA-wide effort aimed at reducing attrition of veterans. In the USDA, we do good work hiring veterans, but need to do more on retention. A project plan for this effort has been developed and was sent to the Forum in late September with an offer for PDI. **Brent** stated listening sessions will start in January 2016 and **Monshi Ramdass** in OHRM will be assisting with the sessions. **Brent** indicated Dr. Parham will send out a notice in advance informing everyone about this effort. There are almost 11,000 veterans in USDA and there is not an expectation they will be able to reach all of them during these sessions. **Brent** stated they will also be analyzing FEVS results. It will probably take about six months to accomplish all of this and produce a report. **Jacqueline Myers**, Food Safety and Inspection Service Deputy Administrator for Management, asked Brent to confirm whether OPM would have a metric for

retention in 2016 and would be using it for comparing our retention rate. **Brent** indicated there will not be a retention rate metric from OPM, but there will be a USDA goal established in the Cultural Transformation report. **Knowles** asked **Brent** if the communications are central to the Department or with agencies as well; **Brent** stated communications are central to both and the Cultural Transformation Officers are already working with the ASA's office on this. **Knowles** thanked **Brent** for the information and clarified the follow-up item needed from **Brent**—the FEVS results regarding the questions from the Union.

**Parking Administration and Physical/Technical Security:** **Knowles** introduced **Duane Williams**, Office of Operations Deputy Director, to address this topic. **Williams** stated that over the past several months, a comprehensive review/study of parking at USDA complex has occurred to identify how parking is allocated by agencies and some issues/inequities with parking privileges. According to **Williams**, GSA has a pecking order for how to allocate parking: 1) Official vehicle; 2) Government; 3) OO-Facilities; 4) Disabled; 5) Vanpool; 6) Carpool; 7) Executives; and 8) Visitors. By definition, executive parking is only for current members of the SES. We currently have 164 spaces assigned for executives, yet only 88 are really executives. In addition, anyone who fails to meet the criteria for the GSA-identified priorities will have to justify why parking is needed. **Williams** indicated the deadline to submit applications has been extended from September 30 to December 31. His team is meeting with parking coordinators about the process to renew parking applications; the renewal process will start in January and their goal is to renew different agencies each month. All parking coordinators will work with the customer service center to ensure applications are complete and valid. All parking passes under the new system will be color coded and issued electronically, which will help ensure participants are in the correct lot. **Williams** stated a specific parking place will be assigned to each individual with numbers on the spaces, not names. However, names will be in the system. His office will follow-up when spaces remain vacant for two weeks or more, and employees who telework for more than two weeks will not be eligible for a parking space. **Williams** indicated this process is really about right-sizing the parking requirements and their office is working collaboratively with parking coordinators to institute the new process. A female attendee asked whether she would lose her parking privileges if she is on travel for a week or two. **Williams** stated the parking coordinator will notify his office if an employee is on travel—they should not lose their privileges, but the parking spot could be used for short-term needs while they are in a travel status. The Office of Operations will install new software to allow for hangtags to be used to open the gate arms in the Whitten Building parking lots. A male attendee wanted to know if an employee eligible for a handicapped parking spot will be limited to that access if they perform two days of telework. **Williams** responded they would be limited unless special circumstances exist. **Berry** asked about spaces negotiated for union officials; **Williams** indicated he is not sure what is out there—but these are spaces provided by GSA. **Knowles** added he is not aware of any labor contracts with parking spaces obligated for union officials at the headquarters complex. However, all agencies are being directed to coordinate LR requirements with their parking coordinators. **Williams** clarified this issue only applies to the headquarters complex. **Ketner** asked if there is a parking coordinator for teleworkers, to which **Williams** responded there is. **Eckley** noted she and **Ray Magee**, NTEU Chapter 226 Executive Vice President, work at Park Office Center and they use space sharing for

teleworkers. **Williams** indicated that seems like a great idea—there are currently two floater spaces for those in the Whitten Building that are typically used by teleworkers. **Williams** continued by stating the Whitten lot is moving away from key fobs due to various problems, and new card readers that hang from the rearview mirror will be used for consistency. The new software will open the gate for the employee based on the card reader. **Knowles** inquired as to what the requirement for parking garages will be; **Williams** indicated they will still employ card readers.

**Williams** segued into the physical security aspect of his presentation and informed the Forum that random screening will start soon. Individuals will be randomly identified by the computer system to be screened—it is a non-invasive process to ensure individuals are not carrying anything that could harm others, e.g., weapons. **Williams** stated a list of items being screened for will be sent to employees. **Ketner** noted he has only seen one announcement of this screening. **Berry** stated a joint communication with the union was requested in the July meeting, but a unilateral communication was sent about two weeks after the meeting. **Knowles** asked how the random selection is done; **Williams** replied he can share that information off-line, but not publicly. **Knowles** followed up asking if people who arrive at parking garages would be subject to a random search—**Williams** indicated they would not. **Ketner** wanted to know what happens if someone has a small weapon that's found during the search and whether law enforcement is involved. **Williams** indicated weapons are confiscated and Federal Protective Services are called if a gun is found during a search. **Williams** informed the group their office is enforcing the requirement for employees to display their ID badge above the waist to ensure security personnel do not have to search in places they shouldn't have to look. **Myers** noted she has seen placards posted in courtyards that identify the list of items being screened for which are very helpful. She then gave **Williams** a sample scenario of 10 people at the door waiting to enter—the first one uses their badge to access the system and the other nine follow. **Williams** indicated this is known as “piggybacking” and it should not occur; each person should individually badge in and out. **Myers** indicated her understanding of that requirement, but it doesn't always seem practical. **Ketner** asked for confirmation it is going to be a non-invasive search, to which **Williams** responded it's not an invasive search; they may simply ask the employee to put their bag on the belt to scan it. **Knowles** asked if **Williams** would be the point person for the joint communication. **Williams** indicated the Forum could work with him or **Gilbert Stokes**. **Williams** shared that he would circle back around as it concerned the joint communication. **Knowles** confirmed there were no more comments or questions and closed this topic by informing **Williams** the joint communication with the Union needs to be addressed since the screening has already begun.

**Implementation of WebTA 4.2 Platform:** **Knowles** introduced **Diane Anderson**, OHRM One USDA Program Manager, to discuss the new WebTA platform. **Anderson** began by thanking the Forum for the invitation and stated she tried to get on the agenda this past summer, but it didn't work out. The new WebTA platform is going to be implemented across the USDA (except for the Forest Service)—existing customers will be converted to the new version and two agencies (NRCS and NASS) will implement WebTA for the first time. The system will be consistent across the USDA unless law, rule or regulation dictates otherwise. **Anderson**

indicated there will be greater security to protect employee information and a greater number of edits to ensure compliance with policy. Many tasks done on paper will now be done electronically. There are four integration points (EmpowHR, FMFI, Table 5 and Mainframe), which will streamline business processes by capitalizing on one-time data entry, and improve the integrity of the data across all systems. **Anderson** indicated agencies are in the process of an extensive data clean-up within each of these systems to ensure accuracy for integration. **Anderson** identified a number of areas with changes from this new version. Work schedules will be input to system with electronic approval by the supervisor then the timesheet will be auto-populated accordingly. Entering time on timesheets will be similar to the current version but will now allow for multiple in and out times for the same day to ensure employees record actual work hours; timesheets will have more space for remarks for any given day or the entire timesheet, and electronic leave requests can be submitted by pay periods in advance. **Anderson** explained two changes related to a new telework component—telework agreements will have to be added to the system in order for an employee to use the telework transaction codes, and ad hoc telework will now be requested electronically (similar to a leave request). **Anderson** added that dollar transactions (such as those for local travel reimbursements) can be input and approval attached to the timesheet for payment. The new version updates various aspects of the Leave Transfer Program—employees can view a list of recipients across the USDA and the remaining hours needed by leave recipients will now be visible. A new and separate feature will allow employees to add emergency contact numbers in the system. **Anderson** indicated training on the new system will be done online using self-guided training modules in AgLearn; standard operating procedures (SOPs) are also being developed and there is an online help tool within system. Before questions were taken, **Knowles** advised it is important for agencies to look at their CBAs as they relate to telework and training. **Anderson** asked if the employees were apprehensive about training. **Knowles** indicated he does not believe it is a question of whether they are apprehensive, but whether or not there is a duty to bargain. **Berry** asked **Anderson** if training will be mandatory; she indicated it would to ensure employees know how to use the system—a training course will be assigned to each employee in AgLearn. **Berry** suggested that requiring all employees to complete training may be overkill. **Eckley** inquired about the timeframe for implementation; **Anderson** indicated they don't yet have firm dates but it will be sometime in 2016. She added that NFC is implementing in pay period 26 and the rest of the agencies will do so in the second or third quarter of calendar year 2016. **Patrick Wicklund**, AFSCME Representative, asked if the interface with FMFI has changed or if it's about the same. **Anderson** responded the interface changes the current manual input process to electronic transmission nightly throughout the year. **Primrose** commented they were the last mission area to be trained on Concur in February, so the Department provided online training, but it still left a lot of questions unanswered. As a result, she wanted to know if any consideration is being given to presenting webinars. **Anderson** stated there will be face-to-face training for those who will have the HR Administrators role, webinars for master timekeepers and regular timekeepers. **Anderson** added there are SOPs and other "aids" being developed and added that a triage team of agency representatives will be available to assist users when the system is implemented. **Ketner** asked why the current platform is messed up for reporting official time, to which **Anderson** replied nothing should have changed. **Knowles** requested clarification for what has changed and indicated we may need to follow up. **Knowles**

stressed the Department has to be able to report on all of the official time codes to OPM. **Ketner** indicated there used to be various options to document union time with timekeeping code 38, but in the past few weeks there has only been one choice. **Knowles** stated he will work to resolve the issue and **Anderson** offered her assistance. There were no other questions or comments regarding this matter, so **Knowles** introduced **Robin Heard**, Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary for Administration, to address the next topic.

**Leasing Acquisition Services Division:** **Heard** began by stating there is a different concept from what was previously briefed because the Secretary has decided to go with a different option. The new organization will keep the Real Property Leasing Officers and other realty employees within their existing agency structures in the three service center agencies, i.e., RD, FSA and NRCS. The Department will only have a small staff to provide coordination, collaboration, quality control, and liaison with GSA regarding delegations and various regulatory issues. The Department will assist with short- and long-term planning to ensure the initial workload is properly balanced to avoid serious workload peaks. The Department will also continue working with brokers for supplemental assistance until the workload becomes more balanced. **Heard** indicated there will only be approximately eight Department employees, and vacant positions will be advertised so service center and Department-level employees can apply. **Heard** advised they are in the process of finalizing the 30-day congressional notification and will be advertising the new positions after congressional notification has been made. **Heard** asked **Primrose** if she would like to weigh in on this issue. **Primrose** indicated this initiative was offered to their labor organizations for PDI. The Unions posed a number of questions to which they are drafting a response. **Heard** summarized her presentation by indicating agencies will deal with their unions directly since this organization will not have a broad impact on the agency realty employees. There being no comments or questions, **Knowles** introduced **Dan Kline**, OHRM Supervisory Labor Relations Specialist, and **Greenhow** to address the Labor-Management Relations Climate Assessment Survey.

**Update on the Annual Labor-Management Relations Climate Assessment Survey:** **Kline** informed the group the survey officially closed on October 23, 2015 after a one-week extension. Just under 32% of those who received the survey responded/participated; last year's participation rate was 40%, but it had been extended for two weeks. **Kline** noted that less than 50% who received the survey actually opened it. The survey data will be extracted and sent to each agency before the Thanksgiving holiday. **Kline** explained that agencies use the data for a number of purposes, most importantly to determine whether goals prepared at the beginning of the year have been met and to complete metric reports. The agencies' metric reports are due to the Department in December, and the Department's report is due to OPM on January 1, 2016. **Kline** deferred to **Greenhow** for additional comments, who added that since the participation rate was lower than anticipated, there may be a number of results that won't be available to agencies. As there were no questions regarding the survey, **Knowles** moved on to the Open Microphone.

**Open Microphone:** **Knowles** began by indicating he received an email from the National Finance Center (NFC) regarding changes to the Employee Personal Page (EPP) effective in pay

period 22 that will provide employees the option to discontinue receiving their 2015 Internal Revenue Services (IRS) Form W-2, Wage and Tax Statement, via mail. His office will forward to agency LROs with guidance regarding potential bargaining obligations. On a different subject, **Ketner** stated he is in receipt of a notice about service performance standards for NRCS, RD and FSA that was sent out last week and looks like a PDI notice. He is receiving a lot of emails about this, but not sure what it is. **Primrose** responded by indicating the new Farm Bill legislation requires field employees to be responsible for producing a receipt of services to customers. This issue is still in the discussion/PDI stage, and the labor team is looking at responses right now. She indicated NRCS developed an automated pilot receipt for services model and there was also a training course in AgLearn that was required last year for affected employees from all three agencies. Although it has been in use for the past year at all three agencies, it was not previously part of their performance standards but will be in 2016. **Ketner** noted the receipt for services only applies to a small number of RD programs. Having no further comment, **Ketner** yielded the floor back to **Knowles**.

**Wrap Up and Confirmation of 2016 Meeting Dates:** **Knowles** indicated although tentative dates were identified on the agenda for meetings in 2016, a great deal of coordination must occur to schedule the room. Meetings are typically on the third Wednesday of January, April, July and October, and the dates will be published as soon as they are confirmed.

**Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:50 p.m.