



Contract Connect

Highlights

- Fourth Remote Negotiations Session sees Some Progress.
- One Management Proposal Repudiates the Current Practice of the Bargaining Unit Proposing their own Schedules.

(May 13, 2019) Negotiations for the new NWS-NWSEO Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) continued during a one-week remote session April 30th through May 2nd, 2019. This was the fourth session between the Parties via GoToWebinar. While NWSEO prefers face to face negotiations, all CBA negotiations are scheduled by mutual agreement to be conducted via webinar.

The session began with Management presenting a counter proposal on its Article 9 – Mid-Term Bargaining. Mid-term bargaining simply refers to negotiations while a CBA is still in force, as opposed to waiting until a contract needs to be renewed or re-initiated. Management's counter proposal allowed management to unilaterally change the conditions of employment (things such as past practices) without the need to bargain over the impact first. There was no way our negotiating team could accept this proposal as the NWSEO **will not be forced to waive our right to bargain.**

The next subject tackled was Article 7, which discusses Union representation and respective management points of contact at various levels of the organization. These levels range from the local level (Steward, Vice-Steward), to regional (Regional Chairs, Vice-Chairs), up to the national level (National Officers and General Counsel). The management proposal would allow *any* Management designee to tackle whatever issues are at stake, while not affording this option to the NWSEO. For example, at offices which do not have a steward or vice-steward, the NWSEO would not be able to name a designee to represent them, which is inherently unfair. All we are looking for is a "level playing field". If Management can designate anybody they want to negotiate at any given level, shouldn't the Union have the same right as well? Why would NWSEO settle for less?

The next facet of Article 7 we discussed dealt with official time and the number of hours allotted to Union Officials. Management's proposal made draconian cuts of up to 75% to the amount of official time currently allotted to the Union President, Vice President, and Secretary/Treasurer.

The NWSEO Chief negotiator and NWSEO team members questioned how this was in the best interest of fostering a positive Union-NWS relationship when there is an unreasonable time constraint placed on one of the parties. Again, NWSEO just wants a “level playing field”. Management has proposed no restrictions for themselves; however, Management did propose restrictions on the Union. NWSEO asked Management, what would you propose we do if you request mid-term bargaining at the national level and NWSEO officers were out of official time? The response from the NWS Chief Negotiator was basically to designate someone who had not used their allotted official time. As a small Union with only three national officers, there is only so much time available. Under management’s proposal, Management could choose whomever they wanted to, and if the three national officers had used up their allotted official time, the NWSEO would have to designate someone who may lack the experience and knowledge of the NWSEO national officers. This is yet another effort to tilt the playing field toward Management by limiting our official time to work on Union issues and mid-term bargaining. Managements proposal is just a Union busting proposal, clear and simple.

On day 2, the Union attempted to move the negotiations along by largely accepting management’s wording in many areas from Articles 10 (Grievance Procedure), 11 (Arbitration), and 13 (Performance Management). Even with this movement, Management was not impressed.

Day 3 started off with Management making what the NWSEO believes is a ridiculous, indefensible and morale busting counter proposal to its Article 20 (Work Schedules of Rotating Shift Workers). One of the sections of Article 20 concerns proposing changes to the work schedules of shift workers, which is one of the primary reasons the NWSEO came into existence over 40 years ago. The Union has always been able to negotiate, through the Local Office Team (LOT) process, bargaining unit employee schedules and changes to such. Management’s counter proposal to this section essentially scraps the right of the Union and the bargaining unit to propose or alter an existing work rotation or schedule and severely restricts the types of schedules the bargaining unit can work. It would not require Management to use the LOT process to discuss changes to the work rotation or to schedules, which is a drastic change from the current CBA. When the NWSEO was formulating its proposals for the new CBA, we sought out and received extensive input from its members on issues of paramount importance to them. As you might expect, **the issue of scheduling was the most important issue listed**, so important in fact that the Union and NWS formed a national team to look into shift work and what we could do to make it more palatable to those required to work it. This team assimilated feedback gathered from over 1,200 NWS employees, nearly 1/3 of the current NWS workforce. The **number one** concern listed was the ability to have flexible shifts, preferred scheduling and seniority-based rotations. Apparently, the number one concern of over 30 percent of the NWS workforce fell on deaf ears as far as management’s latest proposal. As you can imagine, the NWSEO negotiating team was incensed over this proposal, and directly asked the Meteorologists in Charge (MICs) on the Management negotiating team if they supported this proposal and how such a proposal would serve to benefit the hard-working NWS employees in their offices.

But, as has been the case since day-1 of these CBA negotiations, the NOAA attorney who is the NWS Chief Negotiator refused to let the MICs answer, even brazenly cutting off one MIC who tried to speak, "Before you answer, I am going to call you." The NWS Chief Negotiator then tried to defend the proposal by saying what they changed is not in the current CBA anyways. Upon that inaccurate reply, the NWSEO Chief Negotiator decided to move on to another article.

The next remote CBA negotiation session is scheduled for May 28th through 30th. NWSEO is going to continue to provide counter proposals to keep these negotiations moving forward towards the goal of reaching agreement on a new CBA.

The NWSEO Negotiation Team for this session included:

1. JoAnn Becker, NWSEO Chief Negotiator, Meteorologist, Aviation Weather Center, Kansas City, MO.
2. Mike Dion, NWSEO Headquarters Region Chair, Digital and Graphical Information Support Branch, NWS Headquarters, Silver Spring, MD.
3. Jon Fox, Lead Forecaster, Incident Meteorologist, WFO Spokane, WA.
4. Bill Hopkins, NWSEO Executive Vice-President, Lead Forecaster, WFO Lubbock, TX.
5. David Solano, NWSEO Secretary/Treasurer and Eastern Region Chair, Senior Hydro-Meteorologist, Middle Atlantic River Forecast Center, State College, PA.
6. Dr. Nathan Becker, NWSEO Pacific Region Chair, Oceanographer, Pacific Tsunami Warning Center, Honolulu, HI.

The Agency/NWS Negotiation Team for this session included:

1. Kenneth Brown, J.D., NOAA Attorney, National Weather Service Chief Negotiator.
2. Mike Vescio, Meteorologist in Charge, WFO Pendleton, OR.
3. David Murray, NWS Labor-Management Relations (LMR) Liaison, Silver Spring, MD.
4. Sally Pavlow Johnson, Meteorologist in Charge, WFO St. Louis, MO.
5. Ken Harding, Deputy Director, NWS Central Region Headquarters, Kansas City, MO
6. Sam Albanese, Meteorologist in Charge, WFO Anchorage, AK.

Contract Connect, the negotiation newsletter for bargaining unit employees from bargaining unit employees, brings the latest news from the negotiations table to you. It is distributed as quickly as possible after each CBA negotiation session.

-NWSEO-

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than National Weather Service employees.**

**No one works harder for National Weather Service employees
than National Weather Service employees.**

We are NWSEO.