

NTEU 245 is the local chapter of the National Treasury Employees Union. We are proud to serve as the exclusive bargaining unit employee representative for the Trademark Attorneys of the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO). <http://www.nteu245.org>



## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

While you are probably familiar with the services your local union officials provide, you may be less familiar with the vast array of services offered by NTEU National. The National Office works every day to advocate for your interests on Capitol Hill, at the bargaining table, in the Courts, in the workplace, and in the media.

NTEU National now represents some 150,000 bargaining unit employees in about 31 federal agencies and departments, including attorneys at the SEC, IRS and FCC as well as other agencies.

On the Hill, full-time lobbyists educate elected officials on federal employee issues, including pay and benefits and quality of work life matters. Last month, NTEU President Colleen Kelley testified on the subject of federal workforce issues, including recruitment and retention of federal employees, OPM's list of flexibilities and authorities under which federal agencies can offer incentives for federal employees to remain in their jobs, telecommuting, compensation and salary, student loan repayments, the 2008 pay raise, rising health care costs, and contracting out.

At the bargaining table, NTEU National fights for agreements that advance employee rights and benefits, including transit subsidies and work schedules.

In the Courts, NTEU's Office of General Counsel has a track record of establishing major legal principles that further protect their membership. For example, NTEU's Office of General Counsel has been successful in challenging The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) regulations, resulting in the courts throwing out DHS regulations that restricted, amongst other things, collective bargaining rights.

In the media, NTEU National keeps members posted on activities and accomplishments.

Additionally, each local chapter is assigned an NTEU National field representative who is an attorney. The field representative provides legal research and other assistance during negotiations and in filing grievances. Also, any time we end up before a mediator or before the Federal Services Impasses Panel during negotiations, or we go to arbitration

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on other matters, the NTEU field representative is involved in the process.

As you can see, NTEU National works every day on your behalf.

Howard

We're always interested in hearing from you. You can contact me or any other E-Board member by e-mail or write us [nteu245@gmail.com](mailto:nteu245@gmail.com).

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## Legislative Update

By Heather Sapp

The legislative environment for federal workers hopefully got a little brighter on January 4, 2007. With the Democrats controlling both chambers of Congress, issues of importance to federal workers are likely to get more attention.

In particular, Congressman Steny Hoyer of Maryland's Fifth Congressional District, is serving as House Majority Leader, the second-highest position in the House. Mr. Hoyer has a long history of working with NTEU and championing issues that improve the quality of life of the federal workforce.

At the recent NTEU National Legislative Conference in February, Mr. Hoyer promised to introduce a bill to increase the federal government's share of its portion of the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) premium. Shortly after the Legislative Conference, he introduced H.R.1256, a bipartisan bill, with the support of Representative Frank Wolf (R-VA). The bipartisan bill would increase the government's share of FEHBP premiums to an average of 80 percent, up from the current average of 72 percent and will help lower health premium costs to federal employees and retirees.

NTEU strongly supports the bill. Federal employees are paying a constantly increasing share of their paycheck for health care premiums for their families, often at the same time their coverage has declined. For 2006, health insurance premiums increased an average of 6.4 percent. Since 2001, FEHBP premiums have risen by more than 50%.

The pay raise is another of the important issues under consideration in both sides of Congress. The House and Senate Appropriations Committees continue to hold hearings on federal agencies' budgets for fiscal year 2008 and, in the upcoming weeks,

legislation addressing federal employees' and military pay will be proposed. In addition to deliberations by the subcommittees with jurisdiction over federal employees' pay, the military pay raise is being considered by the House and Senate Subcommittees on Defense Appropriations and by the Armed Services authorizing committees.

NTEU has repeatedly pointed out to many members of Congress that both the military and federal workers received a pay raise that equaled the Employment Cost Index plus ½ percent in past years. For 2008, this would amount to a 3.5 percent raise, up ½ percent from the administration's FY 2008 budget submission. This should continue to be the precedent for civilian and military pay. Federal employees are paid 13 percent less than their private sector counterparts, and a raise of 3.5 percent will represent a small step to closing the pay gap.

Finally, Congressman Howard Berman, the Chairman of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Courts, the Internet, and Intellectual Property, has indicated his willingness to visit the USPTO and answer questions for Trademark Examining Attorneys and Patent Examiners. The IP Subcommittee has oversight responsibility for the USPTO, so this would be an excellent opportunity for bargaining unit members. We've been working with Mr. Berman's office to set up a time for him to visit and hope to have this arranged within the next few months.

If you have any questions about any of NTEU's legislative priorities, please contact Heather Sapp, the Legislative Coordinator for NTEU 245 (x28809) or Gail Amidzich in the National NTEU Legislation Department at 202-572-5500, ext. 7048.

## Benefits Available to NTEU Members

By Cathie Faint, VP NTEU 245

Besides the basic benefits of a contract that includes alternative work schedules, work at home options, transit subsidies, fair evaluation and promotion procedures, training and workplace representation, NTEU members can also access a number of benefits through the NTEU National office website. These include various insurance programs, discounts on consumer goods and a no-fee VISA card.

One benefit is access to the Washington Consumer Checkbook *Guide to Health Plans*, which summarizes thousands of facts about the variety of health insurance plans offered to federal employees. The *Guide* rates every health insurance plan available to Federal employees including both the national plans and the health maintenance

organizations (HMOs) and the new dental and vision plan options. The ratings of plan costs take into account premium costs, deductibles, and catastrophic coverage limits. It estimates likely out-of-pocket costs with adjustments for tax advantages that reduce after-tax costs for most employees. It compares maximum out-of-pocket costs based on actual coverage allowed by each plan. Insurance plans are rated by how well each covers low, average or high medical expenses, as well as plan quality and enrollee satisfaction. It gives you the information you need to determine how much money you can save by changing or staying with the health insurance plan you choose.

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Please see Membership on page 5

## Ecommerce Update

By Jennifer Willison and Jordan Baker

*Highlights from the March 2007 meeting*

*What's this about e-mail links to TDR?*

The Office is tentatively planning to begin sending e-mail links to TDR to applicants instead of actual Office actions and attachments by the end of May 2007. The OAs will be sent to a queue and then assigned an address in TDR (the link) and then sent to the applicant. Thus, the applicant will have instant access to the link. The Office, at the request of the Union, is including a directive at the bottom of the OA to e-mail tech assistance for accessing the Office action, ([TDR@uspto.gov](mailto:TDR@uspto.gov)), which will hopefully limit the inquiries to examining attorney regarding merely accessing the OA.

**When are we going to get the new autotext feature in FAST?**

The Office is still planning on rolling out the new autotext/form paragraph database in FY2007.

**Coming X-search improvements**

The Office is planning on improving x-search by allowing the user to sort results in several ways, including by filing date. While the Union only requested that the results be sorted by filing date, the Office offered to make it so more than one field could sort the results.

**TEAS Form Training**

At the request of the E-commerce Committee, who received comments from many examining attorneys who wanted to learn more about TEAS forms, TEAS Project Manager Craig Morris offered TEAS form training sessions. Examining attorneys



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attended the TEAS form training sessions in April and were educated about the ins and outs of the various online forms. The purpose of the presentation was to make examiners more comfortable with the forms and to offer better customer service to applicants who run into difficulties when using the forms and subsequently call the examiner for assistance. The hour-long presentation featured a series of TEAS Response simulations, information on upcoming updates to TEAS, and a general Question and Answer session. If an examining attorney was unable to attend the presentations and is interested in learning more about the material presented, the examining attorney may contact e-commerce committee members.

*The e-commerce committee meets monthly and is comprised of NTEU 245 members and management members. The members of the NTEU 245 ecommerce committee are Dayna Browne, Dawn Feldman -Lehker, Jordan Baker, Sharon Meier, and David Tooley. Any suggestions or questions for the Union regarding the Office systems should be sent to: [n-teu245@gmail.com](mailto:n-teu245@gmail.com). We will make every effort to address your concerns with management. Also, if you have a recurring system problem or concern, in addition to contacting the HELP DESK, you should email [TM\\_System\\_Concerns](mailto:TM_System_Concerns) and cc: [n-teu245@gmail.com](mailto:n-teu245@gmail.com) so we can follow up with management regarding the issues.*

## MEET AN EXAMINER

Changes/Improvements wishes Office would Implement: [More flexibility on use of EA/PAs in addressing substantive issues](#)

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Average Commute to USPTO Campus: [40 minutes](#)  
Best Music Albums or Artists to Examine to: [Les Miz](#)  
Talents, Hobbies, and/or Allegiances [Knitting, reading](#)  
Favorite movie, book, and/ or television program 2007 fiscal year: [Sex and the City, Grey's Anatomy](#)  
Beloved trademarks: [SQUID WITCH, the configuration for the Hummer H2 SUT.](#)

## [TW@H](#) UPDATE

By [Jill Prater](#)

The TWAH Working Group is pleased that another group of examiners will be deployed to work at home next month. Trademark examiners are so fortunate that all examiners who are eligible and wish to work from home will be working from home after this class is deployed. The ten members of our geographic pilot program are currently working from their locations beyond the 110-mile radius and thriving. We are continuing to work with the Office to improve computer and connectivity issues. If you feel passionate about working from home and would like to have input to the TWAH program, please contact Toni Hickey or Jill Prater to discuss joining the TWAH Working Group.

*Membership* from page 2

Members are also eligible for a discount subscription to *Washington Consumers Checkbook Magazine*. *Consumers Checkbook* is a non-profit that rates local service providers for quality and price. These include everything from the best plumbers, veterinarians, auto repair shops and banks to the top doctors and hospitals in the area. A subscription provides on-line access to the *Guide to Top Doctors* and *Guide to Hospitals* throughout the United States.

While you probably have health insurance coverage, NTEU also offers a variety of supplemental insurance plans to cover the incidental costs of accidents, illness and hospitalization. There is a short-term disability plan, two different forms of cancer coverage, accident insurance and universal life insurance.

NTEU members have access to discounts and savings on shopping, travel and entertainment. Discounts are available for services such as Jiffy Lube, hotels and rental cars. There are discounts for shopping on-line at several merchants such as Barnes & Noble and 1-800-Flowers.

The NTEU Platinum Bank of America VISA card has no annual fee and every time you make a purchase, a contribution is made to NTEU. Card members enjoy complete on-line account access, bill payment features and travel planning services as well as travel insurance.

A pre-paid legal services plan is available from the ARAG network that covers basic legal services such as consumer disputes, will preparation, family law and more. The plan offers affordable legal services with no deductibles and no claim forms when you use a network attorney.

Members can access these benefits by signing in at the NTEU National website [www.nteu](http://www.nteu).