From: AFGE Local 17

To: Board BUEs

Date: December 14, 2023

Re: December 13, 2023 Board Town Hall

On behalf of Local 17, we would like to join the Chairman in honoring those groups that completed the 2023 All Employee Survey in a way that reflects positively on the Board. Bravo!

To the other 85 percent of employees who filled out the survey differently, we hear your legitimate concerns about the work environment at the Board. Instead of a slide deck and off-camera dismissal of the issues you raised, here at Local 17, we have been working on addressing your concerns about arbitrary denials of career ladder promotions and WIGIs, and we are drafting the post-hearing brief for the recently concluded arbitration on the on-pace requirement.

Instead of vague admonitions about avoiding procrastination, we fought against the requirement that attorneys prepare pre-hearing briefs without proration and won at arbitration. While we're happy that the Board has hired nearly two dozen SSCs from the attorney ranks, the Union has tried to expand growth and development opportunities for all employees by approaching management to develop a policy for proration for participation in career development programs, such as VASP, Leadership VA, and other programs that can help a broad swathe of Board employees advance their career not only here at the Board, but elsewhere in VA and the federal government. Despite setting an all-time production record, senior management cut off the conversation because they were upset that they had not been able to raise the quota for attorneys this year.

In response to the dismal numbers on the AES survey, the Chairman promised a "holistic" reevaluation of the awards and recognition program at the Board, but his management team has refused to engage in conversations this year with the Union over the unilateral changes that have been made to the program. Instead, the management team has brought us last-minute invitations for nominees to the awards Power Point presentation where award recipients can try to spot their name in 11-point font on the slide deck. They even managed to schedule the last awards "ceremony" during the November 29, 2023 Congressional oversight hearing where Vice-Chairman Ken Arnold and AFGE Local 17 President Doug Massey testified. A hearing which, by the way, lasted longer than all of the Board-wide PACT Act training combined.

On the bright side, we are encouraged that senior leadership continues to acknowledge that workload is the top concern amongst its employees year after year, and they have taken positive steps towards alleviating that concern by proposing to increase everybody's workload. We especially appreciated the Chairman's claim that he decided to maintain the attorney production quota last year, since his management team proposed a significantly increased case quota with elimination of the issues track, and negotiations broke down because they refused to negotiate in person, a right enumerated in our collective bargaining agreement. But given that Board employees set an all-time record for decisions dispatched last year under the old quota, we can't imagine that management will have an issue with leaving the quota the same for next year.

Please keep an eye on your inbox for an upcoming AFGE Local 17 townhall meeting that will happen well before May 2024. We can promise you that Local 17's senior leadership will be on camera, the chat will be open, and we will be responsive to your questions and concerns, instead of explaining them away with the promise of newsletters and "serious consideration".

In closing, we'd like to congratulate senior leadership for their role in making the Board the 315th best place to work in the Federal Government in 2022.   The Board will likely be ranked as approximately 410 out of 432 federal agency subcomponents in 2023 - still way ahead of the Bureau of Prisons, which should count for something. While someone's gotta be at the bottom, it is our earnest hope that management takes action to improve its sub-par performance.