

# NFFE News



## **NFFE Meets with Secretary of State Antony Blinken to Discuss Worker-Friendly Modernization at Passport Services**

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In January, NFFE Local 1998 President Lee Wentz and NFFE National President Randy Erwin met with Secretary of State Antony Blinken to discuss labor-management relations at the State Department and to provide input on the Department's goals for the new year. This was a welcome opportunity, as members of NFFE Local 1998, who work at Passport offices across the country, have been pushing for modernization of their workplaces for many years.

“The first main topic I was asking for was work systems that allow us to perform our jobs in an agile and adaptive fashion, which would include remote work and telework,” said NFFE Local 1998 President Lee Wentz. “The second ask was for expanded workplace flexibilities and employee development to provide a larger range of career opportunities.”

NFFE's asks of Sec. Blinken align with the Biden Administration's priority to utilize expanded flexibilities in work arrangements, such as expanded telework and alternative work schedules. These efforts are a key part of Biden's “strengthening and empowering the federal workforce” pillar of the president's management agenda.

“I reminded the Secretary that these items fall in line with the speech he gave back in October about the modernization of the State Department,” continued Wentz. “I told him we can't wait another ten years. This needs to happen in the next two to three years, at the most. Our systems are outdated, and we can't be functioning on technology that is decades old. We are simply asking to be treated as the professionals we are, with proper equipment that works and flexible schedules that are afforded to many other government employees. If the Secretary wants the State Department to grow and become a modern workplace, we must be given the opportunities to do so.”

“We had a great meeting with Secretary Blinken,” said NFFE National President Randy Erwin. “We talked about ways to increase workplace flexibilities - like telework - in the State Department. NFFE Local 1998 President Lee Wentz did a great job of explaining how important these workplace flexibilities are to NFFE-IAM members working at Passport. I took the opportunity to emphasize that these workplace flexibilities aren't just nice for workers, they will be absolutely essential for the State Department to recruit and retain talent in the post-COVID economy when employers across the country have already made these worker-friendly changes. That message was well-received by Secretary Blinken.”

NFFE will continue to advocate for expanded workplace flexibilities at Passport and throughout the federal government.

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