

# American Federation of Government Employees

*Affiliated with the AFL-CIO*

## Council 260

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The American Federation of Government Employees National Archives and Records Administration Council views recent reports involving personnel issues and morale problems at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum with concern and distress. AFGE is proud to represent the bargaining unit employees who staff the 13 presidential libraries and museums that are part of the National Archives, including the Kennedy Library and Museum in Boston. This role has a symbolic importance for our union. It was President Kennedy who in 1962 issued the executive order recognizing federal employees' collective bargaining rights.

Recent media accounts have done a universally poor job of explaining the distinction between the federally run library and museum, staffed by career civil servants, and the private foundation that supports the library's mission and sponsors events. Reading the news, one would think that the library and the foundation were co-equal partners, or that the library is subordinate to the foundation. One may even conclude that the director of a private foundation had the authority to dismiss the staff of a federally operated institution. This would be contrary to employees' due process rights under the law and to the merit systems principles that make our civil service the finest in the world. Nevertheless, the recent discord, culminating in the departure of library director Thomas Putnam, signals serious morale problems that inhibit the ability of library employees to do their jobs effectively and efficiently and in a manner that recognizes the library's obligations as a federal organization.

We are troubled by suggestions in press reports and in a joint library/foundation meeting that consultants hired by the foundation will be interviewing federal employees included in the AFGE bargaining unit. This would represent a staggering transgression of the foundation's proper role. AFGE will vigorously oppose all attempts to intimidate the library's federal employees and to disrupt the library's federal chain of command. National Archives employees serve the American people, not a private foundation, and they are accountable only to the taxpayers.

Relationships between presidential library directors and presidential foundations are notoriously difficult to navigate. We call on NARA and Kennedy Foundation leaders to carefully consider what an appropriate relationship between the library and the foundation must entail, what it must avoid, and to act accordingly.