

June 9, 2003

To: Casey Schaffer

Subject: Union Comments on LES Automation

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Department of Interior's plans to discontinue printing individual leave and earnings statements, having employees print their own statements through the Employee Express system instead. The union suggests that the Department of Interior (DOI) implement this plan by giving employees the "option" of "voluntarily" receiving their Leave and Earning Statements on-line through Employee Express system rather than making it mandatory. In this manner, DOI could gauge employee interest in the scheme and work out any kinks before across-the-board implementation. The union's comments generally fall into the following categories: Security issues and Privacy Act concerns; validity and availability of employee-generated Leave and Earnings Statements; and true costs savings.

Security Issues and Privacy Act Concerns: Secure access to the Employee Express system is not our real concern as Employee Express uses the Secure Socket Layer encryption to connect the web browser, and everything is encrypted until it is displayed on the screen or the web page contents saved to a hard drive.

The REAL security issues and concerns are in printing the Leave and Earnings Statement. Most employees do not have a printer with a "direct cable connection" to their workstation. Thus, each time an employee prints their Leave and Earnings Statement an unencrypted web page would be transmitted over the network to a server (Novell, NT, Windows 2000). The server would create a file with a copy of the Leave and Earnings Statement in order to direct it to the requested printer. This happens even if there are no print jobs in process. Since the print queue is a large buffer of disk space, it is not overwritten until enough jobs have been cycled through that particular printer. Some larger HP and Xerox printers also have their own disk drive directly holding printer queues to improve network connectivity.

As the employee's Leave and Earnings Statement transits the Local Area Network (LAN) between the user workstation and the server providing the print services, it is unencrypted and can be viewed as clear text by any system that can view and display network traffic. The data again transfers from the print server to the physical printer in an unencrypted form. All the individuals responsible for monitoring the network for diagnostic and performance analysis could view the data on the Employee's Leave and Earnings Statement. But even more troubling is that software capable of providing this capability is included as part of Windows XP in standard configurations. In a "shared" network environment (multiple users on a single physical segment), other users can capture and view the traffic of any user on that segment.

The Leave and Earnings Statements include information that is covered under the Privacy Act, as well as information that is considered personnel sensitive. Each LAN Server, and the individual printers connected to the LAN should be treated as a piece of infrastructure transporting, storing, and processing Privacy Act and personnel sensitive information. The DOI should be required to identify all components in its network

structure that will (or may) transport, store, or process data from the Leave and Earnings Statements and institute appropriate security controls on each. There are acceptable technical solutions to achieve the required levels of confidentiality on the network and internal to the servers, they simply need to be implemented as appropriate.

Validity and Availability of Leave and Earnings Statements: Employee Leave and Earnings Statements are legal documents used for income tax receipts; for obtaining college financial aid; for lower-income employees to qualify for certain county, state, or other Federal benefits; for obtaining mortgages and other loans; for divorce proceedings dealing with alimony and child support; and to qualify for private disability insurance; not to mention verifying disputes with regard to leave balances or retirement benefits. Will third parties accept an employee-generated Leave and Earnings Statement for the above purposes? There needs to be procedures in place, for obtaining an “official” Leave and Earnings Statement within a reasonable period for the legal purposes.

There also needs to be a procedure in place for supervisors to grant immediate temporary waivers for employees in unforeseen circumstances. For example, when an employee is involved in a serious car accident or other unforeseen illness and is incapable of even requesting a waiver. Leave balances would be very important in this type of situation.

There is no statement about employees being allowed to access the Employee Express on government time instead of their lunch hour, etc. Specific time should be set aside, such as an extra 15 minutes per two-week period, to do so. There is also no statement on how long prior to the most current three pay periods the statements will be available. We need some assurance and commitment from the DOI that these statements will be kept as long as needed, and are accessible within a reasonable time, free of charge, to the employees. Ditto for personnel who leave the DOI, either through involuntary separation, attrition, retirement, contracting out, or a RIF. Will they still have access to older LES records after they leave the DOI?

There should be set procedures in place on how Leave and Earnings Statements are handled upon the death of an employee. How does the employees’ estate receive a copy of their last Leave and Earnings Statements? The executor probably would not have the employee’s password. The union suggests that a paper version be mailed to the employee’s last address.

Employees were denied computer access during the first few weeks of the Corbell litigation case in 1999, and then the computer access for the USGS was restored. There needs to be more assurances of what will happen to the LES should a similar situation happen again in the future.

True Cost Savings: There is no explanation of the methodology used in arriving at the \$400,000 cost savings to DOI. The DOI will save a significant amount of money on postage, to be sure. However, some of the cost is simply being transferred from one component of the agency to another as employees print out their statements on the printers and computers in their offices. In addition, implementing adequate security

measures will increase costs initially, but are a necessary expenditure that DOI might want to request additional one-time funding from Congress for. To this end, the union suggests the DOI estimate the true cost of implementation, along with the long-term savings, and explain the methodology it used to come up with the savings.

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