

SSA in Crisis:

Why is a simple solution not easy?

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SSA has been on a downward trajectory for the better part of two decades. The obvious question should be: how can we fix it? However, the more prudent question which no one seems to be asking out loud is: why is a failing leadership continuously permitted to execute its vision of failure? Einstein is famously quoted as saying: “the definition of insanity is repeating the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” In this instance, the insanity is in placing faith in a leadership that appears to have no sense of fidelity to its most valued asset (the BUE) in stark contrast to the egalitarian principles that are the bedrock of the most successful American program devised to protect our most vulnerable in their time of need, a program that should command the same reverence and sanctity as the

Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. SSA has not demonstrated any dedication to the precepts of such a concept. Instead of being ameliorative, SSA leadership embodies the attributes and deficiencies of oppressors in search of a triumphant result from a perceived zero sum game versus the Union and by proxy every bargaining unit employee. Contrary to SSA leadership's rhetoric, this perfidious disposition is completely volitional and often gratuitous.

What is completely discounted by SSA leadership is that it is the frontline employees that engage tirelessly and with dedication to the American public that often goes beyond their physical capacity despite staffing deficiencies, inept leadership, and indiscriminately devoid of assurances that their well-being is valued by leadership. Because of leadership's immutable fealty to optics over quantifiable results, SSA surreptitiously engages in the manipulation of data that would otherwise expose a diminished staff that is unable to meet the ever growing demand of the American public. In furtherance, SSA exploits its employees by giving them more work than they can reasonably achieve with any level of proficiency. As a result, employees feel alienated from the nobility of the work that they do because failure is inevitable, thus denying employees of any sense of accomplishment that should be a prerequisite for any semblance of achievement that routinely leads to satisfaction in the workplace.

The impolitic of SSA leadership is emblematic of the Agency's strong aversion to working in tandem with the Union to resolve issues efficiently and effectively. While the Union conversely is unequivocally willing to show immeasurable deference to the Agency for the purpose of practical solutions and ideas that would bring comity to the employees and efficiency to the delivery of public service; empirical evidence strongly suggests that the Agency would prefer inefficiency and counter productivity than demonstrating even a modicum of deference to the Union because this would infer a relationship of interdependence that is anathema to the Agency's disposition that relinquishing an iota to the Union would be tantamount to empowering the Union representing a loss to the Union. This defective, yet destructive mindset makes current SSA leadership impervious to good counsel and a detriment to the goals and objectives of the Agency's mission and its future.

This makes SSA the metaphorical rudderless ship on the precipice of capsizing, bringing slow ruin to the greatest anti-poverty program conceived by American Exceptionalism. History has shown us examples of how equally colossal failures had been remedied. Some of the largest corporations in business: Apple, Fiat, Merck, Marvel Enterprises, and Chrysler, some of which have economies of scale larger than many small countries have all found themselves in situations where their respective leadership was causing diminishing results. Spoiler alert: not one of these corporations sought to continue with the failing

leadership as a viable response to misfeasance, nonfeasance, or incompetence. What did happen was leadership was changed and every one of these companies changed their trajectory and embarked on their greatest levels of profitability. Even though SSA is not predicated on making a profit, the same principles apply, requiring a leadership that demonstrates imagination, innovation, accountability, and above all else, veneration and respect for their rank and file employees—similar to SSA, the frontline workers are indispensable and should be treated so. If SSA leadership is not replaced, it will continue to flounder in a sea of maladministration, opaqueness, and a lack of respect for its most valued asset: its frontline employees.

It cannot be enough for leadership to want to succeed. The Agency needs a plan to succeed that is not subordinated by politics or a predisposition that the employee's voices do not foreshadow what ails SSA. We need a leadership that has the motivation to do what circumstances demand. We need leadership that will be bold when necessary; will be innovative when necessary; but above all else, we need a leadership that is not afraid to lead and knows when to follow. The recalcitrance in not seeking change emanates from success not being quick or unambiguous. SSA leadership must possess the moral fortitude to do what is right irrespective of political pendular winds. SSA leadership operates under the fallacy that it cannot fulfil its mandate by showing empathy and compassion for its employees. In fact, empathy is a prerequisite for promoting an

engaged and committed workforce. Moreover, we need a compassionate culture within the workplace where our leaders are consistently demonstrating genuine interest and concern for its frontline employees and a willingness to respond to the everyday concerns of the BUE and prioritize its concerns. A leadership that is prepared to act in such a way will incentivize and invigorate a BUE to aspire to being its best, which will translate in optimal and potentially stellar civil service. This can only be achieved when AFGÉ is recognized as a bona fide partner and every bargaining unit employee as a stakeholder in the success of SSA.