



April 13, 2020

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Mark A. Morgan
Acting Commissioner
U.S. Customs and Border Protection
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20229

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf and Acting Commissioner Morgan:

We, the undersigned presidents of NTEU chapters around the country, are urging you to reinstate the temporary weather and safety leave schedules established at CBP ports of entry along the northern and southern borders.

The adjusted schedules, tailored to meet the needs of port employees and port officials during a deadly pandemic, were a smart, common sense step to help protect the health and safety of all CBP employees, our families and the general public.

We strongly disagree with the decision to abruptly cancel these local work schedules while the threat of COVID-19 persists and public health officials at every level of government are urging people to shelter at home as much as possible to help stop the spread. Many of us have coworkers who have tested positive for COVID-19. And it is now an accepted fact that asymptomatic employees can infect others. Reducing the weekly hours of each employee at the port means safer distancing between employees and reduces the frequency of interactions between employees and with the traveling public. That reduces the potential for the transmission of the virus.

As you know, the global health crisis and travel restrictions at our borders have greatly reduced traffic volumes at our ports, which allowed local NTEU leaders and port officials to shorten work weeks without disrupting port operations. The cooperation that led to the adjusted schedules was a model of how our federal government can operate with efficiency and effectiveness when labor and management work together.

And to be clear, officers on weather and safety leave were not on vacation. They were on call, and subject to be recalled to the port whenever needed. In addition, there was an underlying understanding that overtime would not be assigned when the assignment could be performed by an employee on weather and safety leave.

Granting employees paid administrative leave was a strong sign that CBP management valued the frontline workforce and placed their health and safety as a top priority. Rescinding the schedules has, unfortunately, squandered that goodwill.

The stated purpose for rescinding the schedules was to provide support to Border Patrol. We are always willing to support our colleagues at Border Patrol, but we have seen no evidence that additional support is needed. In fact, many of us have been told by our Border Patrol colleagues that none is needed. Efforts to manufacture that need will be seen for what it is by employees and will only further promote distrust and undermine morale.

Together, we represent tens of thousands of frontline CBP OFO employees, and we ask you to immediately restore the ability of local ports to create work schedules that will help limit the spread of coronavirus while keeping our nation's ports of entry open in the long term for business that is essential to our economy.

Sincerely,

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Ricardo Munoz
President, Chapter 140

Dale Symington
President, Chapter 157

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