

From the Georgia bureau and the South Desk staff to SOR regional editor Lisa Pane and other managers, submitted 10/19.

Dear Lisa, Oscar, and Mike,

We are disappointed that AP managers are refusing to meet with staff to discuss the company's proposals. Though you say such discussions are best left at the bargaining table, you continue to forward to us the company's spin on contract negotiations.

We are deeply unhappy and concerned about the contract the company is offering. We find it insulting and unacceptable.

AP employees are among the most hard-working and dedicated in the business. We know that. Our sources know that. Our competitors know that. It would be nice if the company would acknowledge that with a fair contract proposal.

The health care plan the company is proposing is atrocious. It amounts to thousands of dollars more per year for staffers. That, along with the fact that the company is also proposing wage increases that will almost definitely fail to keep up with inflation, would be financially devastating to many employees.

The company's desire to be able to transfer staffers against their will, regardless of seniority, would put staffers in the unfair position of having to either uproot their lives to keep their jobs or quit. Those who resign would end up being doubly punished by AP's proposal to slash severance packages.

Eliminating mileage minimums for photo and video staffers is a slap in the face to staffers who run their vehicles into the ground in the service of the AP. They are staffers who lift hundreds of pounds of equipment on a daily basis and sacrifice much of their vehicles' space to the company so they can be ready to mobilize at a moment's notice. They should be compensated accordingly.

We are also concerned by the company's apparent refusal to maintain an adequate workforce. It is absolutely impossible for us to maintain an appropriate level of production when we have (in the

Atlanta bureau, at least) a third of the staff we had five years ago. Forcing people to pile more and more tasks on their plates and to work increasingly long and erratic shifts can only lead to staff burnout and an unacceptable decrease in value of our product.

Please pass along our concerns to the company.

Below are some of our individual thoughts on the company's offer:

"I want the AP to listen to its workforce. I want a contract that fairly compensates workers and that attracts and retains the most talented journalists."

- Ray Henry, ATG

"When the Beat of the Week is awarded, it is never to a bean counter looking for ways to squeeze the staff's wallets more. It is always to people who go above and beyond to get that important story. AP staff keeps AP working by going above and beyond every day to get it right and to be FAIR! We are asking that AP do the same and offer those doers something FAIR for them and their families."

- Carol Druga, SOR

"Aside from health care costs and wages, I'm concerned about the AP's ability to produce high-quality and multi-format journalism as we struggle to keep up with workloads that, at times, seem insurmountable. Filling in critical coverage gaps could help in this area."

- Phillip Lucas, ATG

"A study I recently read claimed companies that encourage and support employees increase profits by 28 percent. If you research the link between employee happiness and company productivity, the facts are it matters a lot to the bottom line. So to not lose our best journalists and provide the best AP product we can, I think it is important for the company to be fair and show progress in contract talks, not that employees are losing ground that will only lead to losing our best employees, the best minds."

- Marina Hutchinson, SOR

“To call AP’s proposal anything other than a pay cut is intellectual dishonesty the likes of which we wouldn’t publish on the wire without a rebuttal and clarification were it coming from an elected official. Further, the spousal coverage proposal suggests management values short-term, marginal savings over maintaining a family friendly company that rewards employees with stability. Stable employees become long-term contributors to the AP’s product and, thus, to a financially healthy company.”

- Bill Barrow, ATG

“I am concerned about health care costs and my wages.”

- Jonathan Drew, SOR

“Forcing staff to continually do more with less while effectively cutting wages through increased health care costs and wage increases that don’t keep up with inflation is not a good strategy to attract and keep a talented workforce.”

- Kate Brumback, ATG

“I am concerned that the company’s proposed insurance plan amounts to a significant pay cut for AP workers. I am deeply concerned that as AP continues to lose and not replace veteran journalists, the quality of AP’s product is suffering.”

- Don Schanche, SOR

“I’ve just reached my 10-year anniversary with AP, and the staff reductions I’ve witnessed in the Atlanta bureau are shocking. When I walk through the office and see one staffer sitting alone manning the ATG ship, I think of my time on the news desk and how many staffers were needed to maintain the coverage expected of AP. I’m impressed by the report produced by today’s reduced staff, but how long can AP keep asking its staffers to do more for less?

“We’ve had our pensions frozen and now we’re handed a health-care proposal that penalizes staffers for their age while taking more money from every staffer’s family budget. This health-care proposal leaves staffers burdened with more than \$11 million in costs over three years.

“Another part of this proposal which troubles me is the company's wish to be able to transfer staffers against their will, regardless of seniority.

“These proposals are unacceptable.”

- Charles Odum

AP Sports Writer, Atlanta

“I am very concerned about health care costs and spousal coverage.”

-Bernard McGhee, SOR

“Be FAIR! to the AP families.”

- Bill Cormier, SOR

“Smaller staffs mean AP reporters are already producing more stories, shooting more of our own photos and video, and working more nights and weekends while surrounded by more empty desks. Cutting the benefits of those who remain proud, loyal employees is just wrong. The AP is better than that.”

- Russ Bynum, SAV

Other ATG and SOR staff members who are unhappy with the AP's proposal:

- Debbie Newby, SOR

- Mike Stobbe, ATG

- Jeff Martin, ATG

- Janelle Cogan, SOR

- Norm Gomlak, SOR

- Jonathan Landrum Jr., SOR

- Chris Davis, Tech

- Lisa Adams, SOR

- Jacob Jordan, SOR

