Dear FISE Members,

Several of you have contacted me to ask about an email message you received from a former union staff employee. This email contained statements that were not just ridiculous and false, but also libelous. I am writing to give you accurate information about how the union is representing you and spending your money. I’ll also be happy to talk with any of you about your additional questions.

Your elected board members are dues-paying members just like you. We understand how important it is to spend our union dues wisely. Times are tough economically, so we need to stretch our money and defend and represent our members more than ever.

In the past year, the board has had enormous success in reducing the administrative and overhead costs of running the union. At the same time, we’ve won many crucial victories for members, and here are some examples:

1. Each Board member has been assigned staff representation duties to represent you, our members, in grievance and arbitration matters. The assignments to Board members are based on geographic location, which means travel costs have been greatly reduced. Additionally, by having Board members perform these functions, the need for union-paid staff at a cost of approximately $100,000 per year per staff person has been diminished. Also, elected Board members receive their federal salary but no additional compensation from the union for their work.

2. We have instituted a new policy aimed at resolving grievances at the lowest level possible. We believe that by developing positive working relationships with local staff, we are able to resolve many issues in our members’ favor without resorting to costly legal battles. However, we are not afraid to fight: Since our term in office, we have favorably resolved dozens of grievances and arbitrations. In fact, we have not lost a single arbitration since taking office. We have successfully arbitrated an award of payment to wildland firefighter members for safety equipment, we have successfully fought for the reinstatement of improperly terminated members with a total back-pay award in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. We continue to fight against improper Reduction In Force (RIFs), and to negotiate a new collective bargaining agreement that will greatly improve the treatment of members by management. These are just a few highlights of how we have worked for you over the past year.

3. We have purchased an office building in Albuquerque, New Mexico that is wholly owned by the union. Rather than paying high rent to a landlord that is never recovered by the union, this office building is an investment for the union. Our monthly costs are lower already, and the money invested in the building will return to the union if the building is ever sold. This is a more cost-effective use of your dues, and is an investment in the union’s future.
Finally, you may not know that when this Board was elected, the union faced a $300,000 budget deficit due to the unsustainable spending of previous staff. Through revised workload assignments, decreased travel expenses and other savings measures, we have closed this deficit and have managed to create a positive balance sheet for the union. Our job is not done. It is our duty to institute further changes that will ensure our longevity well into the future. The entire FISE Board is committed to continue to serve the best interests of our members.

In solidarity,

Sue Parton, President