

2020 Officer Report

Executive VP for Advocacy Mark Mickelsen

2019 Efforts

Since April 2019, our Federation Advocacy Officers, including the Executive VP for Advocacy, the Congressional District Liaisons (CDLs), and Senatorial Liaisons (SLs), have accomplished the following:

- Mark Mickelsen, Executive VP for Advocacy and SL for Senator Heinrich, met on July 31, 2019 with Alex Eubanks, New Mexico Field Representative for Senator Heinrich, in Sen. Heinrich's Albuquerque Office. They discussed the four NARFE priority issues communicated to us by the NARFE HQ Advocacy Dept.:
 - Opposition to cuts to our earned benefits (including how our retirement system is funded and why the proposed cuts would not save money and do not make sense);
 - Postal Reform without harm to current or future postal workers and retirees;
 - Fair COLAs for Federal Retirees and Equal COLAs for CSRS and FERS Retirees (asking Sen. Heinrich to support similar bills that may be introduced in the Senate); and,
 - A fair pay raise for Federal Employees, e.g., a 3.1 percent raise next year.
- Mr. Eubanks was very receptive to NARFE's position on these issues and stated that he would brief Senator Heinrich and the Washington, DC staff on our priorities. Mark asked him to convey our sincere thanks to Senator Heinrich for his continued support.
- In addition, Mark has emailed Senator Udall, Senator Heinrich, and Rep. Lujan asking them to oppose the Administration's plan to merge OPM with GSA and the Executive Office of the President.
- Mark emailed the CDLs and SLs, Federation Board, and Chapter Presidents to keep them informed of legislative developments, including the Administration's proposed changes to OPM; a fair pay raise for Federal Employees; Postal Reform; and revisions to the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP).
- Mark also conducted the audit of the revenues and expenses of the April 2019 New Mexico Federation Conference/Region VII Conference in Las Cruces. He found that the revenues and expenses were properly accounted for and documented.
- Judy Rosco, CDL for Rep. Xochitl Torres-Small in the 2nd Congressional District, wrote to the Congresswoman regarding Social Security, and to the Congresswoman, Sen.

Heinrich, and Sen. Udall asking them to oppose the Administration's reorganization plan to merge OPM with GSA and the Executive Office of the President.

On August 1, 2019 Judy Rosco and Mark Mickelsen met with Rep. Xochitl Torres-Small and her Field Representative Ashley Beyer (Judy in person and Mark patched in by phone) at the Congresswoman's Las Cruces Office. They presented NARFE's positions on the same issues outlined above in the paragraph about Mark's visit with Alex Eubanks of Sen. Heinrich's staff. Mark presented specific information about how our retirement system is funded and why the Administration's cuts are damaging to Federal Employees and Retirees and do not represent real savings. Rep. Torres-Small was receptive and asked a number of good questions regarding the rationale of those seeking to impose the cuts, and why they make no fiscal sense. With this discussion, Mark has now presented this to all five members of the New Mexico Congressional Delegation. Judy also presented information on the issues of fair and equal COLAs for retirees. Rep. Torres-Small is supportive of the Federal Employee/Retiree Community and has voted in favor of NARFE issues.

Judy invited Rep. Torres-Small or one of her staff and Sen. Udall or one of his Las Cruces staff to attend the Las Cruces Chapter's Legislative Breakfast in September. In addition, Judy emailed Gary Montoya, President of NARFE's Sierra County Chapter, Dee Gragg, Alamogordo Chapter Legislative VP, and Lorna Howerton, Albuquerque Chapter President, to let them know of the Aug. 1 meeting with Rep. Torres-Small. Judy also invited them all to the Las Cruces Chapter's September Legislative Breakfast.

- Bill Britton, CDL for Rep. Ben Ray Lujan of the 3rd Congressional District, and Mark Mickelsen met on August 8, 2019 with Eric Chavez, Field Representative for Rep. Lujan. Bill presented NARFE's positions on the following NARFE priorities:
 - Eliminating COLAs for FERS Retirees and reducing CSRS COLAs by 0.5 percent;
 - Eliminating the FERS Annuity Supplement for new FERS retirees;
 - Moving from the High-3 retirement formula to the High-5;
 - Reducing the rate of return on the TSP's G Fund;
 - The President's proposed 2020 pay freeze for Federal Employees; and,
 - Increasing Federal Employee payroll contributions toward retirement by up to 6 percent with no corresponding increase in benefits.

Mark provided some clarifications on these issues, especially regarding how the FERS system is already pre-funded. Therefore, these earned benefits are already paid for so the cuts do not save money, and the employees would have recourse to recover their contributions if these benefits were to be reduced or eliminated.

Bill also discussed the Fair COLA for Seniors Act that would move us from the inadequate CPI-W Inflation Index to the more accurate CPI-E Index more consistent with the expenses of Seniors. He also explained the need for the Equal COLA Act that would provide FERS Retirees the same COLAs as CSRS retirees. Bill requested that Rep. Lujan co-sponsor these House bills.

Next, Bill presented the rationale for supporting a fair, 3.1 percent pay raise for Federal Employees next year. In addition, he discussed NARFE's desire to repeal the WEP and the Government Pension Offset (GPO). In this regard, he informed Mr. Chavez that Rep. Kevin Brady of Texas has introduced a bill to replace the current WEP formula with a less damaging formula. NARFE supports this bill, and he requested that Rep. Lujan co-sponsor the bill. Regarding Postal Reform, Bill explained the need to oppose the provision that would force Postal retirees to elect Medicare Part B as a condition for retaining their FEHB insurance. Finally, Bill discussed recent efforts to repeal or mitigate the WEP and GPO. We asked Eric to convey our thanks to Rep. Lujan for his continued support.

- Lorna Howerton, Albuquerque Chapter President and CDL for Rep. Debra Haaland in the 1st Congressional District, invited Ms. Brenda McKenna, Field Representative for Rep. Haaland, to attend the Albuquerque Chapter's August Meeting on August 4. Mark Mickelsen also attended this meeting. Lorna introduced Ms. McKenna. Ms. McKenna explained her role as a constituent advocate in Rep. Haaland's office, and then explained Rep. Haaland's support of Federal Employees and Retirees since being elected in 2018. She stated that Rep. Haaland supports adequate pay for Federal Employees, ensuring that Federal Employees have excellent working conditions and opportunities, which will also help to recruit the best and brightest for Federal service. She also told the assembled NARFE members that Rep. Haaland was extremely pleased to have met in April in her Washington, DC Office with the New Mexico NARFE Delegation who attended the 2019 NARFE National Legislative Conference.

Ms. McKenna then presented information to the Chapter about upcoming Town Halls and Constituent Coffees with Rep. Haaland in Albuquerque, Los Lunas, and Moriarty. She also distributed her business card and stated that she (Ms. McKenna) was always available and ready to meet with NARFE members and constituents on issues important to them. She then took questions from the audience. Questions included a request to explain Ms. Haaland's position on the recent 2-year congressional budget agreement; her position on safeguarding the benefits of our Federal Employee Health Benefits Program and how those relate to the guarantees contained in the Affordable Care Act; whether Ms. Haaland supports adequate Federal Retiree COLAs; and how to prevent future government shutdowns. Ms. McKenna stated in each case that Rep. Haaland supports the NARFE position on these issues.

2020 Efforts

2020 has thus far been a relatively quiet period legislatively due to the Federal Government's preoccupation with dealing with the Coronavirus crisis, so there is less to report than usual. Congressional consideration of legislation that could affect the earned benefits of Federal Employees and Retirees has either been postponed or just not come up yet for review.

However, there was some movement in Washington, DC based on the President's FY 2021 Budget Request to Congress, which was released in February 2020 prior to the onset of the Coronavirus crisis. Unfortunately, the Administration continued to advocate a number of proposals harmful to our earned benefits. I informed the Chapter Presidents and Chapter Legislative Chairs about this and requested that they mobilize their members to support NARFE's position:

- To oppose the Administration's proposals to cut CSRS COLAs, eliminate FERS COLAs, eliminate the FERS Annuity Supplement, move to the High-5 retirement formula, and reduce the value of the G Fund in the TSP, among other harmful measures. Thus far Congress has refused to enact these measures, thanks to NARFE's opposition.
- To oppose the Administration's attempt to merge OPM's functions into the Executive Office of the President and GSA. Thanks in part to NARFE members' energetic opposition, Congress rejected this proposal.
- To oppose the Administration's proposal to privatize large parts of the US Postal Service operations. Again, thanks in large part to NARFE members' efforts, Congress also rejected this proposal. NARFE members also lobbied Congress in favor of repealing the requirement that USPS pre-fund 100% of its health care costs for the next 75 years, which is a leading cause of USPS' ongoing deficit. This has not yet occurred but is still on the table for the future.
- To support Congressional bills to provide a fair 2021 pay raise to Federal Employees. Last year this resulted in the favorable 2020 raise enacted by Congress and supported by the Administration.
- To support two bills (one in the House by a Republican and a companion bill in the Senate by a Democrat) were introduced to completely eliminate the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and the Government Pension Offset (GPO). Also, two bills were introduced in the US House of Representatives to reduce the impact of the WEP, one by a Republican and one by a Democrat. NARFE supports the two bills for the full repeal of the WEP and GPO as the ideal solution. However, NARFE also supports both House bills to reduce the impact and provide some relief to those affected in case we cannot get a full repeal. Mark requested that our members contact their Representative and Senators to support these bills.

Finally, Mark worked to make the arrangements for our Federation participation in Senior Day at the Roundhouse on Feb. 14 and our Board Meeting on Feb. 13 at the Inn of the Governors. We had a successful Senior Day staffing our information table in the Roundhouse Rotunda, assisted

by the NARFE Santa Fe Chapter. Governor Lujan-Grisham even stopped by our table for a photo op, and to greet us and express her support for NARFE. We supported a bill introduced in this session to exempt Social Security from New Mexico state taxation. The bill did not get very far in this session but has promise for the future. Much will depend on the state budget outlook, which is currently in trouble due to the double whammy of the oil market price collapse and the budget problems associated with combating the Coronavirus and helping the unemployed in New Mexico. However, we will continue to support this bill. We will also seek the guidance of NARFE HQ on how to help move it forward and get it passed in a future session.