



**INAUGURAL SW FEDERATION  
Minutes of the Southwest Federation Conference  
In-Person Meeting  
May 16-17, 2025  
“Building the Future of NARFE in the Southwest”**

**Friday, May 16**

Southwest (SW) Federation President Mark Mickelsen welcomed members from near and far and called the conference officially opened at 8:42 am followed by the invocation by Janice Bridges.

The Mayfield High School AFJROTC posted the colors, the National Anthem was played followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Bill Matisse, representing the Mayor of Las Cruces’ office, welcomed the group followed by a welcome by Debbie Moore from the Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce.

District Director Cynthia Hull representing Representative Gabe Vasquez, spoke to the group followed by a video from Representative Vasquez. Representative Vasquez supports federal workers and annuitants and stands with the SW Federation.

Deborah Corner read the Proclamation from Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs and Mark Mickelsen read the Proclamation from New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham and a statement from New Mexico Senator Martin Heinrich supporting federal workers and retirees. The two Governors both proclaimed May 16 and May 17 to be “NARFE Days” in their respective states.

The conference was attended by 59 in -person attendees and 7 Zoom members. SW Federation President Mark Mickelsen introduced our guests: National President Bill Shackelford, our National Secretary/Treasurer Cindy Blythe (by Zoom), our own Region 7 VP Sharon Reese, the Region 5 VP Linda Sawvell, Colorado Federation President Frank Impinna and his wife Dolores, and Nancy Carlson-Gotts from the Utah Federation. He then introduced the 5 in-person FEHB/PSHB health insurance carrier representatives: Blue Cross/Blue Shield (New Mexico Reps.), GEHA, New Mexico Presbyterian HMO, and the GEHA-United Healthcare Medicare Advantage Plan plus Brian Sperling from BlueCross/Blue Shield (Arizona Rep.) by Zoom.

**Keynote Address:** National President Bill Shackelford noted that in 1955 the California Federation was the first federation in the nation. He then presented the SW Federation Charter to Mark Mickelsen and Deborah Corner. (Note: This has been given to the SW Federation Secretary to retain.) National President Bill Shackelford gave a headquarters overview, discussed budget and finance, advocacy, and membership; he noted that the Biennial FEDCon24

was very successful; urged everyone to use FEDHub; stated that the new AMS is very close to 100% complete and that there will be a M-112 report for National Only members; the headquarters building is still on the market; the investments with Morgan Stanley are in good shape with 62% from dues revenue; he encourages ALL chapters and federations to get the liability insurance for \$100/year; he discussed privacy; indicated that membership numbers are up – during the 12 months of 2024 4,878 new members and 4 months of 2025 5,235 new members with 126 in the SW Federation area; he noted that there is a new membership brochure; discussed DEI; and he noted that there is now a “FED UP” poster on a 6-story garage on New York Avenue in DC. At this point, he took questions.

Following the Keynote Speakers address, SW Federation President Mark Mickelsen presented National President Bill Shackelford with a gift as a thank you for coming in person.

**Las Cruces Village Retirement Center:** The Director of Senior Living, Marty Hart, spoke to us on what the Village consists of – independent living, assisted living, and 95 bed health care facility for those 55 or older. When asked he indicated there are two locations in Arizona – Prescott Village and Prescott.

**Vendor Appreciation:** We then had speakers from each of the vendors: Blue Cross/Blue Shield (New Mexico), GEHA, New Mexico Presbyterian HMO, and the GEHA-United Healthcare Medicare Advantage Plan plus Brian Sperling from Arizona BlueCross/Blue Shield by Zoom.

### **Door Prize Drawing**

**Remarks by Cindy Renee’ Blythe, National Secretary/Treasurer:** Since taking office she has transcribed 10 sets of previous NEB minutes; is updating and changing NARFE publications and noted that there is an updated Membership Application form but will use up what is on hand before using the new one; noted the annual financial audit is currently being done; talked about the Budget & Financial Department, the HR Department and the Audit Report; discussed the 990-N form and that the deadline for filing is now past; talked about the liability insurance and noted the deadline is June 12, 2025 to obtain it at a cost of \$100/year; and noted the Marketing Campaign by our contractor Street Level Studio, and the FED UP wrap around that is now on the 6-story building on New York Avenue in DC.

**Remarks by John Hatton, Director, Staff Vice President, Policy & Programs:** He gave a recap of 2024 efforts: WEP/GPO repealed; no cuts to earned Federal benefits; increased number of cosponsors for the Equal COLA Act; improving OPM retirement services; and advocating for choice for postal health benefits. The overview for 2025: Oppose cuts, protect the integrity of government operations and merit based civil service, support full COLAs; health insurance - to maintain choice for Part B Medicare, allow Part D opt out, and reimbursement for part of Part B premiums; and improving OPM Customer Service, modernization, and proper funding. Threats: Schedule Policy/Career (P/C) formerly Schedule F, privacy, and DOGE and Executive Orders. He also mentioned LEGCon25 and NARFE PAC to build relationships. He then took questions.

### **Lunch Break**

## **Door Prize Drawing**

**Remarks by Nora MacDonald, Senior Director, Member Engagement:** She reported that in the past NARFE had a 14% yearly decline in membership and last few years it was 5% decline. From 1/1/2025 to 4/30/2025 we have had a net gain of 2,245 members or a 400% increase versus 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 204. Said the Trump administration is driving membership increase. They are working with Street Level Studio and BRG Communications for marketing and public relations. She indicated that Region VII has 8,123 members, 2,404 chapter members, and 5,719 national only members. There is no longer a Life Membership. The goal is to grow revenue, grow membership, increase non-dues revenue, and improve efficiency. She mentioned the Open House Program and Ambassador Program. What is next? Website refresh, ongoing digital campaigns review, and publication ads. She then took questions.

**Remarks by Jennifer Rafael, Senior Director, Technology and Communications:** Jennifer Rafael talked about working with tech partners and CAB on the AMS system; new Microsites Dynamics 365, Higher Logic, AMS, and FEDHub. She announced that just today (May 16, 2025) that the Southwest FEDHub Community is populated. That we will now be using Zoom for webinars and hybrid meetings. Jennifer then took questions.

## **BREAK**

## **Door Prize Drawing**

**Remarks by Sharon Reese, Region VII Vice-President:** She recognized members with personal accomplishments – Dave Fox and Frank Impinna. Frank has just obtained his doctoral degree. She recognized the Sierra County Chapter 1314 on their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, presenting the certificate to Marian Thornton; and the Sunnyslope Chapter 1686 on their 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary, presenting the certificate to Carol Culbertson, Chapter President. She noted that as soon as the new SW bank account is opened, the National Office will deposit the 10% dues funds; these funds have been held pending the completion of the merger. She urges that the SLs and CDLs work more with their state representatives and possibly the chapters join the local Chamber of Commerce. It was noted that the SW Federation will be under a microscope for the next year to see if this merger is/was worth it. Region V is considering a merger of North Dakota, South Dakota, and Minnesota. She indicated that both Arizona and New Mexico has increased membership – 932 chapter members and 2946 national only members. She then presented certificates of appreciation to attending former AZ and NM Board Members as well as current SW Board Members – Coral Van Hooser, Etta Bryant, Marlene Seaton, Sharon Willoughby, Mark Mickelsen, and Deborah Corner.

**Tony Genta Awards:** SW Federation President Mark Mickelsen then presented the Tony Genta Award to an Arizona and a New Mexico member that have done exceptional jobs serving our members these past two years. For Arizona, to Vic Peterson and for New Mexico, to Carol Main.

**Memorial Recognition of SW Federation Members who have passed away:** Past Arizona Federation President Deborah Corner read the names of Arizona chapter members and SW

Federation Vice President Marlene Seaton read the names of the Arizona national only members. Past New Mexico Federation President Mark Mickelsen read the names of the New Mexico chapter and national only members. These were members that had passed away in 2023 and 2024.

**Summary of membership in the Southwest Federation, opportunities for outreach, and communication challenges:** Carol Main indicated she had sent 2 emails regarding the vote to merge plus 1300 were mailed to those without current email addresses in the system, and then 2600 emails were sent to let members know that the merger had been approved. She gave some chapter and national-only member counts both for the federation and for the chapters. She talked about microsites and that if a chapter would like a chapter website, the chapter can contact either a CAB member or herself (Carol Main) Region VII CAB officer.

### **Door Prize Drawing**

### **Wrap up for 1<sup>st</sup> day and Preview of 2<sup>nd</sup> day**

**Saturday, May 17**

### **Door Prize Drawing**

The meeting was called to order by President Mark Mickelsen at 8:30 PM followed by a moment of silence. Marlene Seaton gave us a short history of the Pledge of Allegiance and following this the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

**Organization and priorities of the new Southwest Federation:** SW Federation President Mark Mickelsen noted that geographically the new SW Federation is the third largest in NARFE; smaller than Alaska and Texas but now larger than California or Montana; and provided some distances and driving times to some locations on the West and East coasts to show the comparison with our new large SW Federation. We still need to keep our advocacy and PAC separate; Arizona currently has 9 representative and New Mexico has 3 representatives. The FEDHub community is now up and running for the SW Federation. The Arizona and New Mexico Board members met frequently and came up with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) thanks to RVP VII Sharon Reese. We had to discuss many things, reach a consensus, compromise on some things, and prepare to implement an organizational framework. It was not easy but we found that we can work together. He then listed the four elected officers and the members that he has appointed as CDLs, SLs, and for NARFE PAC. He noted that we will need volunteers to be committee chairs and members for a membership committee, a member Involvement committee to work with our members and chapters, a strategic planning committee, an audit committee, a nominating committee, and other committees that we find warranted to establish. He indicated that the SW Federation wants to be accessible to all our members, to hear their ideas and suggestions, to answer any questions you may have, and to help in any way we can. He made a special plea for all members to join FEDHub as this will now become our main means of communication since the old email system is not used anymore. It was noted that there are tutorials on the website to learn about FEDHub.

**Elected Southwest Federation Board Member Reports:** Marlene Seaton, Vice President, noted that she has visited the Arizona Sunnyslope Chapter and the Arizona Mogollon/Payson Chapter; she set up and conducted the first SW Federation Zoom meeting and has worked with Carol Main and her husband in setting up Zoom for this conference; she helped design the SW Federation ad for this conference book; has been a sounding board for the President; and has been learning about the Arizona political landscape and learning about the Arizona chapters and the at-large national membership population.

Etta Bryant, Secretary, reported that the secretary takes the minutes, types them up and distributes them. The minutes from the board meeting on May 15, 2025, are typed up and is now taking notes from the conference and will take the minutes at the post board meeting on May 17, 2025. She also noted some of the officer positions that she has held over the year.

Sharon Willoughby, Treasurer, noted that her duties are to receive all monies of the Federation, deposit them, and pay all vouchers. She makes a financial report at each board meeting and an annual report at the annual meeting showing income and expenditures by category. She also prepares a line-item budget for each fiscal year. She noted that the SW Federation bank account has not yet been established as we need to obtain the EIN number from IRS first.

Mark Mickelsen, President, noted that he has been working with the previous Arizona and New Mexico federation board members and the Las Cruces Chapter 182 host chapter members. He has appointed the CDLs and SLs for both Arizona and New Mexico and some other appointments. He has had communications regarding the Social Security back payments since WEP/GPO has been repealed. He has visited the Sunnyslope and Mogollon/Payson Chapters with Marlene Seaton, and hopes to attend Tucson Chapter 55 in October 2025 and the Yuma Chapter 0266 in January 2026. He has also visited all the New Mexico Chapters this past year. He discussed the budget cuts to FERS benefits and noted that by cutting these, there are no real savings because these monies do not go back to the taxpayers. He then thanked the Arizona and New Mexico boards and the SW board.

#### **Alzheimer's, Area Officer, CAB, and NARFE PAC Reports:**

**Alzheimer's:** New Mexico NARFE PAC Chair, Lorna Howerton, not available.

**Area Officer and CAB:** SW Federation Area Officer and Region VII CAB Officer, Carol Main, reported that CAB stands for Configuration Board. If a member goes to [www.narfe.org/cab/tutorials](http://www.narfe.org/cab/tutorials) one can find tutorials on AMS, FEDHub, Member Tips and Tutorials, etc. While on this screen, click on Contact CAB in the upper right-hand corner and scroll down to Region VII to get help. She indicated that as Area Officer she has access to additional data information.

**AZ NARFE PAC:** Deborah Corner reported it is super important to connect with your representative and two senators and to send letters/emails with personal information included. Stated that you do not have to do something every day but often.

**NM NARFE PAC:** Della Apodaca indicated why NARFE PAC is important and ways to contribute including being a sustainer. She indicated that she submits a 2-page report to the SW Federation President and to the Chapter President and she reports to the chapter board quarterly. It was noted that March is NARFE PAC month and talked about making monthly contributions by credit card or through your dues. She sets a goal for each quarter such as 20% of the chapter

members contributing. She indicated that NARFE PAC helps get access to our representatives and builds relationships.

### **Door Prize Drawing**

### **Trivia Questions**

### **Break**

### **Reports by AZ and NM Advocacy Chairs**

**AZ Federal Legislative Chair:** Roger Corner talked about importance of advocacy; he gave numbers of democrats and republicans in Arizona and how many democrat and republican representatives there are plus two NARFE friendly democrat senators. He then talked about the percentages of party affiliation.

**AZ State Legislative Chair:** Vic Peterson mentioned that the Social Security Fairness Act was passed and signed by President Biden; that NARFE friendly Congressional District 7 Rep. Raul Grijalva had passed away and the election to replace him will not be until September 2025. On the state side, he noted that they are proposing a lot of voter suppression bills to make it more difficult to vote but so far, the Arizona Governor has vetoed these.

**NM Federal Legislative Chair:** Judy Rosco noted that she was just appointed in March 2025 and that she has registered for LEGCon25. She mentioned NM H.R. 491 and H.R. 492 and a bill about federal income rights. She noted that the SW Federation is a 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Platinum member for the number of emails/letters sent to our representatives. She encourages that when emails/letters are sent to add our own issues. She has introduced herself to her other 4 chapters. She said “talk policy not persona”.

SW Federation President Mark Mickelsen noted that NM is 43% democrat, 32% republican, and 25% independents by voter registration; that all three representatives and both senators are all democrats; a very blue state. However, NARFE is bipartisan and we will work with anyone from all parties or as independents who support us and our legislative agenda. We have had Republican support in the New Mexico Legislature. He noted that Grass Tops are our NARFE National President, NARFE Advocacy Leaders such as the Director, Staff Vice President, Policy & Programs, John Hatton, our SW Board members, and our CDLs and SLs from New Mexico and Arizona. Grass Roots are the members. We need both Grass Tops and Grass Roots to work together to make our advocacy effective.

**Q&As:** Need to show members how to get to the website and to advocacy letters and/or scripts to use for phone calls. Get information out to chapter legislative officers. Keep the flow going. A discussion on ways to communicate advocacy to our members.

**Presentation of LEGCon 25:** Lorna Howerton, CDL for New Mexico's 1<sup>st</sup> Congressional District was not available. Deborah Corner noted that LEGCon is to teach and train members on how to contact and meet our representatives and/or staff members and usually talk to the staff members. SW Federation President Mark Mickelsen mentioned that LEGCon is by Zoom and there are different sessions that you may want to attend; on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day there will be individual sessions with your own representative or senator.

**Discussion with SW Federation Board:** There was a discussion on how to involve chapter and national only members in NARFE's work and succession in officers. There is fear, especially being afraid of too much work involved in being a chapter officer. We need to find ways to help people overcome this fear and see that being an officer doesn't have to be burdensome. Suggested officer assigns duties to other members and this might prepare that person to step up and take over that officer's position later. Need to talk with members face to face.

## **Lunch**

### **Zoom with Greg Stanton, Arizona Congressional District 4**

### **Video with Yassamin Ansari, Arizona Congressional District 3**

**Question and answer session with National President and SW Federation Board:** A question was asked about allowing military members to join NARFE. NARFE President Bill Shackelford indicated that he needs to talk with our lawyers to see if our corporation can be changed to allow this. A couple of other comments were for the SW Federation to move slowly and do it right and to make programs interesting.

In going through the Arizona storage unit, a NARFE song was found, it was played and sung, and then noted that it would go to the National Office and be put on display.

It was noted that some changes are needed to the Merger Guidelines; #1 assign an Area Officer so that they will have access to all states involved in the proposed merger; #2 consider the cost of merging such as the cost of postage for notifying member by letter and email.

## **Door Prize Drawing**

**Alzheimer's Drawing:** 50/50 Total donated and \$139 to the winner.

SW Federation President Mark Mickelsen made some final comments and reminded members to complete their Evaluation Forms and turn in their name tag holders. He then thanked the Host Chapter, Las Cruces Chapter 182 for such a great first conference and outstanding job, along with the prior Arizona and New Mexico Boards and the current SW Board for their contributions. Thanks also to Bob Main for running the Zoom for us. The conference adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

*Etta Bryant*

Etta Bryant  
Southwest Federation Secretary