



NARFE
National Association of Retired Federal Employees

Newsletter

Chapter 0834, Murfreesboro, TN

MAY 2011

Legislative Report

Currently there are severe attacks on federal employees and retirees by politicians and the media.. The Budget Resolution being considered by the House of Representatives is asking the Federal Family for an unprecedented level of cuts – a whopping 375 billion in ten years. Policy recommendations in the House Budget Resolution include proposals to: Freeze employee pay for five years, cut the federal workforce by ten percent, require employees to significantly increase contributions to civil service retirement and disability fund. There are proposals to delay cost of living adjustments, delay COLA's until age 62, significantly raise the cost of Federal Employees Health Insurance by imposing a voucher system in which enrollees would pay a higher percentage of premiums each year to the point many could no longer afford health insurance. In March Senator Richard Burr of North Carolina introduced S.644, a bill which would eliminate any defined benefit retirement plan (FERS) for newly hired federal workers. This would make the first time since 1920 that the Federal Government would operate without a defined benefit plan.

While we feel that we should do our fair share to get the government out of this fiscal mess I do not think that we should be the deficit scapegoat. Federal retirees have already lost 50 billion dollars in the 1980's and 1990's due to reduced, canceled and deferred COLA's which did not affect Social Security recipients, additionally WEP (Windfall Elimination Provision) and GPO (Government Pension Offset) have also created hardships for many retirees. This is just the beginning. We have a huge battle on our hands and need every NARFE member to tell their former and current co-workers who are not part of NARFE to sign up and join us in this fight. Matt Bauer

President's column

The fifty-fifth annual convention of the Tennessee Federation of Chapters was held April 18 and 19th in Nashville, TN, and I was honored to attend. We had many good speakers and much business was conducted and useful information provided to us by various speakers. Ms. Elaine Hughes, National Secretary, was able to provide insight on NARFE programs being generated at NARFE National Headquarters. She stated that among the many goals that they have at the headquarters level is getting NARFE into the 21st century. This is being done in several ways one of which is "e-narfe" where new members can join NARFE by logging on to the NARFE website. The disadvantage of e-narfe is that a new member may not be assigned to a chapter as many new retirees may not wish to participate at the chapter level. I think the chapters are the backbone of NARFE and hopefully new members will join in their local chapter. The new NARFE Information Technology Advisory Committee should be able to come up with improved reports for the chapters. The report system that NARFE Headquarters uses has been a source of many complaints over the years. It is expected that NARFE Headquarters will have installed and have operating a new computer system by the end of the year. Additionally NARFE is now on Facebook and is gearing up for twitter.

A recurring theme at all NARFE conventions is Membership. Ms. Hughes fears that we have now dropped below 300,000 members nationally. Even though we do a good job in recruiting new members we do a terrible job in keeping them. Most new members drop out in the first and third year. NARFE Headquarters is looking at ways to give these new members additional attention so that they retain and continue their membership. Only 15% of federal retirees are NARFE members and only 1 % of active employees are NARFE members. Membership in NARFE for active employees is crucial because many of the cuts that Congress is considering will adversely affect the active employee. NARFE Headquarters has also started the "Protect America's Heartbeat Campaign." The purpose of this campaign is to fight back against the attacks made on federal worker's benefits and reputations. Now, more than ever is the time "To Protect America's Heartbeat." The article on pages 22 and 23 of the April NARFE magazine explains this campaign.

I am looking forward to seeing more Chapter members at our monthly meetings. All meetings are held on the first Thursday of the month at Shoney's on Broad Street with the exception of a picnic in June and Christmas Luncheon in December. Meetings are a good opportunity to receive valuable information and to share time and memories with your fellow retirees. Our meeting begins at noon but many attendees also participate in the famous Shoney's buffet prior to the meeting. Remember that NARFE's mission has remained the same since 1921, to protect and improve the retirement benefits of federal retirees, employees and their families. Matt Bauer

Our picnic will be at Siegel Park on June the 2nd. Our speaker will be Andrea Lawrence and she will be talking about the Fisher House. Everyone should be there between 11:00 and 11:30. Please contact Naomi Yarbrough 890-0707 if you have any questions about what to bring, etc.

Tim Graves reminds us to keep our old Newsletters on file that list all the forms that we need including F-100 "Be Prepared For LIFE'S EVENTS." Anyone needing a F-100 can get one from Tim at our monthly meeting.

We are thankful that our membership has held steady for the past six months; however, we are down about 10 members over the past year or so.

FE Newsletter Article, Chapter 0834, Murfreesboro, TN

This is just the beginning: During our recent Tennessee Federation Convention, Elaine Hughes, National Secretary, gave an informative talk and I will summarize some of her talking points. We're what some call "Low-Hanging Fruit." – The first ones to be picked. We have to work harder to protect our earned benefits while at the same time playing a major role in improving the general public's image of Federal workers and retirees. Legislative representation is still job one for NARFE. There are two important flashpoints in the budget battle over the earned retirement and health benefits of Federal workers. The first is increasing the statutory limit on the public debt. The second flashpoint is the House of Representatives' consideration of the annual budget resolution. This will be the crucial point when budget hawks in Congress will be at the height of their leverage by withholding their vote for a debt limit increase until there is consensus on making unprecedented cuts in entitlement and other direct spending programs. Consideration of the 2012 Budget Resolution means lawmakers would, for the first time in the 112th Congress, deliberate over entitlement spending, which makes up about 65 percent of the Federal budget. It asks the Federal family for an unprecedented level of cuts, \$375 billion over 10 years. The policy recommendation in the House Budget Resolution include proposals to freeze Federal employee pay for five years; cut the workforce by 10 percent and require employees to significantly increase their contribution to the Civil Service Retirement and Disability Fund. There are proposals to lower Federal civilian cost-of-living adjustments; reducing the employer matching contribution for the thrift savings plan; and impose a voucher system in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program in which enrollees would pay a higher percentage of premiums. Senator Richard Burr of North Carolina introduced S.644, a bill which would eliminate any defined benefit retirement plan for newly hired Federal workers. This would make the first time since 1920 that the Federal Government would operate without a defined benefit plan. If there is no FERS annuity, then there will be no FERS survivor benefit. What actual cuts are approved to reach the \$375 billion dollar is still under consideration. Senator Burr's Bill represents a significant change in the structure of civil service benefits with the potential of adversely affecting the Government's ability to retain the talented personnel whose experience and expertise keep our citizens safe and secure and our country strong. We need every NARFE member to tell their former and current co-workers who are not part of NARFE to sign up and join us in protecting our earned benefits. Connie Gaessler