



NARFE NEWSLETTER

GREATER BOWIE-CROFTON AREA CHAPTER 1747

National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association

Volume 35 No. 6

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February 2017

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS are held at the Bowie Senior Center, 14900 Health Center Drive, Bowie, 20716 in Room 4. Meeting dates are the third Thursday of the month at 10:00 AM except in July and August. There is never a charge to attend and all meetings are open to the public. Please check your current newsletter or our website for any changes.

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETINGS are held the first Thursday of the month at 10:00 AM in Conference Room 125, Bowie Senior Center. All chapter members are welcome.

NOTE: Chapter meetings are cancelled when Prince George's County schools are closed due to inclement weather. Otherwise, meetings are held as scheduled.

COMING ATTRACTIONS

❖ **General Meeting:** Thursday, February 16: Ernie Walker, from the Emergency Preparedness section of the Prince Georges Emergency Management Office speaks on how to make emergencies a bit easier to survive.

❖ **General Meeting:** Thursday, March 16: Ellen and Jim Dinnerman, Expanding End-of-Life Options: Compassionate Choice, Legislative Actions in Maryland and the District of Columbia.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

JERRY KURSBAN

Are You Committed—Or Just Complacent?

COMPLACENCY is defined as "A feeling of being SATISFIED with the way things are and NOT WILLING to try to make them better." **RETIREES**, are you satisfied if the cost of your Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program (FLTCIP) increased an average of 83 percent (and in some cases 126 percent)? Are you satisfied if you are among the 30 percent of federal annuitants who were NOT "held harmless" with respect to the increase in your Part B Medicare premium, which includes almost all those covered under the CSRS system? Are you satisfied knowing that Chained CPI, which would be used to measure changes in consumer prices and reduce the purchasing power of your annuity, is back on the table for consideration? Are you complacent that your future retirement benefits will match the purchasing power of your current benefits?

ACTIVE EMPLOYEES, are you complacent with respect to the proposal to institute a federal hiring freeze (with exceptions for military, public safety, and public health functions)? How confident are you that the report recently issued by the Heritage Foundation, which proposes cuts of \$333 billion to federal pay and benefits over a decade, including reductions in FERS ben-

efits, cuts in pay, in paid leave and FEHBP benefits, will not see the light of day? Or that the bill introduced by Rep. Rokita (R-IND) which would enable political appointees to fire civil service employees for "good cause, bad cause or no cause at all," without notice or the right to appeal, won't be enacted?. Or are you comfortable with the Holman Rule, discussed in detail in the Federal Legislation article in this newsletter?

These items are just the tip of the iceberg. Read carefully the article in your February 2017 NARFE magazine entitled "Post-Election Federal Forecast—Severe Threats Ahead"—on pages 24–31, and read the article on page 6 as well. So, in light of these threats, are you complacent and willing to simply acquiesce and unwilling to take any action? Or are you willing to contact your member of Congress now, using NARFE's toll free line: 866-220-0044. Or willing to use NARFE's one-stop site to send a letter to your Congress member, available at NARFE's Legislative Action Center at www.narfe.org.

Finally, are you willing to help continue NARFE? **We desperately need members to step forward and serve as officers and committee chairs for the chapter.** If no one is willing to take on these jobs, there will be no NARFE as we know it. Please step up because **you need NARFE**, the only organization dedicated **exclusively** to protecting your earned benefits, and now **NARFE needs you**. Please e-mail or phone the members of our nominating committee: either Ed Bice at de3637@verizoncom (301-464-3748) or Bob Cullen at ba3537@aol.com (301-262-4783).

DAYS TO REMEMBER

February 7	Federation Board Meeting: Bowie Comfort Inn
February 16	General Meeting
March 12–15	National Legislative Training Day
March 15	NARFE Day on Capitol Hill

A Very Important Election

May 18, 2017 is a critical date in the history of our chapter. On that day we will vote on a new slate of officers (President, Secretary, and Treasurer) for 2017–2019. If chapter members do not come forward to run for these positions, we will have to close our chapter and seek to merge with a more active chapter in the area. It would be a shame and embarrassment to do this since our chapter has more than 1,000 members (since Chapter 1122 merged with us last year). As an example, a nearby chapter has less than 400 but has no problems in getting people to run for office and to do other chapter tasks. Our hope is that people from the original Chapter 1747 and people from

the old Chapter 1122 will come forward to keep our chapter a strong and vibrant organization.

Anyone who is interested in becoming an officer or who needs information on officer duties should contact Ed Bice or Bob Cullen at the phone numbers or email addresses contained in the Newsletter. Contact information for both is also listed at the end of the president's message.

Thank you for giving serious consideration to this matter. You can share offices or jobs, or volunteer for a single event. We are one of the largest chapters in Maryland—we CAN continue with a little help.

FEDERAL LEGISLATION

DR. HOWARD WATERWORTH

Congress Adopts a Rule that Allows Firing Individual Employees

The New Year has ushered in the 115th Congress and with it are their searches for ways to reduce expenditures, including several that will affect Federal employees and annuitants. Among them are proposals to reduce the size of the workforce, to make reductions in Social Security and Medicare, to eliminate programs and to terminate individual Federal employees. NARFE President Thissen is committed to "protecting the earned benefits of active and retired federal employees" according to his January 6 email.

The newest wrinkle to reduce expenditures is the resurrection of the 1876 procedural Holman Rule. It is unique in that it allows individual lawmakers to make targeted spending cuts by lowering the salary or eliminating the job of individual federal employees or groups of employees—a move that threatens to upend the 130-year-old civil service, according to the Washington Post. Some 2.1 million civil servants would be made vulnerable by this Rule, especially those who have been on paid administrative leave. Annuitants are not mentioned in the provisions of this Rule. The targeted cuts would override existing federal workplace protections. The Holman Rule would be implemented by attaching names of persons or positions as amendments to appropriations bills, which would require approval by the House and Senate. Before this change, an agency's budget could be cut but a specific program or employee could not be targeted because of civil service protections.

Use of this Rule is intended to increase the powers of individual members of Congress as administration policy demands. Their individual proposals would not require input from the affected persons or their agencies. Democrats and employee unions say this Rule will alarm the federal workforce because it comes in combination with President Trump's criticism of the Washington bureaucracy and his call for a freeze on government hiring. House

Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) said the Holman Rule "gives Congress a chance to change how the government works".

Many Democrats have commented on implementing the Holman Rule saying this rule is "a backdoor way for Republicans to dismantle the federal workforce." Sarbanes said this Rule is an assault on employees based on the 'political whims of Congress'. Steny Hoyer railed against the Holman Rule in his speech on the floor that this rule change will allow Republicans to make "short-sighted and ideologically driven changes to our civil service". Maureen Gilman of the National Treasury Employees Union with some 150,000 feds, said this is "part of a very chilling theme..."

Looking back to the 114th Congress, some 18 bills had been introduced that would have benefited Federal employees and annuitants. They would have provided a 3.8 percent pay raise for Feds (HR 4855), given the President authority to provide wage grade employees a pay raise (HR 485), provided the OPM greater authority over the prescription drug-pricing methods of the Federal Health Program (HR 2175), and repealed the Government Pension Offset and Windfall Elimination Provision (HR 973). All were referred to committees, where they will 'die' rather than any follow up action by the new Congress.

STATE LEGISLATION

ED BICE

The 2017 session of Maryland's General Assembly started on January 11 in Annapolis facing a budget deficit in FY 2017 and 2018.

Some senators and delegates have moved into new positions of leadership. Senate President Miller has appointed Senator Douglas J.J. Peters (D-District 23), a resident of Bowie, as Majority Leader of the Democratic Party in the Senate. He continues to be a member of the Budget and Tax Committee.

Members of the State Legislative Committee (SLC) met with representatives from Governor Hogan's office as well as Senator Miller's office, Comptroller Peter Franchot, and Senator Ed

Continued on page 3

State Legislation continued from page 2

Kasemeyer, Chair, Budget and tax Committee to discuss our legislative agenda.

The SLC has two principal initiatives for 2017. We hope to make Maryland the top retirement choice for Marylanders and other retirees in the mid-Atlantic region and to provide a long term care insurance incentive to reduce the state Medicaid burden.

We urge the state to become a more attractive retirement prospect by implementing a three part program. First, the state would begin a four year phased-in exemption for all seniors starting with Federal and military pensions, then extending the exemption to other government pensions and, finally to all senior pensions. Maryland would provide a tax credit benefit for small businesses, especially those that seniors own or which hire seniors to work in their businesses Finally the state will

change the Homeowners Tax Credit (HTC). Currently the credit is limited to low- and moderate-income homeowners. The HTC formula would be changed to increase the tax credit for eligible homeowners with lower incomes, to adjust credit schedules for inflation, and to increase assessment limits.

Similar changes in formulas and definitions would provide an incentive for long term care insurance (LTC). First, Maryland would encourage purchase and retention of LTC insurance by the younger (age 50–60) population when premiums are lower. Annualizing the present one-time \$500 tax credit by allowing a \$250 tax credit for the next two years would encourage purchases. In 2019 Maryland would introduce an annual \$500 for new or returning purchasers. The more attractive \$500 annual credit should encourage sales and retention of LTC insurance. Each sale will help reduce the state MEDICAID burden in the future.

A Huge and Heartfelt Thank You For Two Members

Thanks go to two members who have helped us out. Jackie Wilson won the General Meeting 50-50 raffle and donated her winnings back to the chapter's Alzheimer's Fund. for a grand total of \$54.00. Vanessa Washington has volunteered to take over the newsletter in September 2017. **Bravo,** ladies!

TREASURER'S REPORT

Balance on: November 30	\$10,188.58
Receipts:	1,071.80
Disbursements:	1,695.58
Balance on: December 31	\$9,564.80
Reserve for Alzheimer's Fund	\$180.00

Balances are for 2016.

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Why Should You Attend the Legislative Training Conference?

The NARFE Training Conference will be held March 12 through the 15. There is still time to register--you can use the form on page 13 of this month's magazine.

But why go? And why learn the best ways of influencing Senators and Congresspersons? The answer is that our best chance of keeping earned benefits comes from the people who control the money and write the rules. Learning how to improve your advocacy skills can help all federal employees.

We live in a small ring of close-in suburbs. We, and the other first ring suburbs, have the best change to build strong relationships with our legislators. You don't have to give thousands of dollars to get your legislative people and their staffs to recognize you. It will be easier to reach them to tell how, and why, you support certain votes. We all know that we respond better to a name we know than to some John Doe from Not Near Here.

You need to focus on a few benefits or votes rather than making random assertions at every possible change in benefits. You demonstrate your commitment and care to governmental changes by effectively targeting a few important issues. Yet the information you have, and the positions you take will show that you support NARFE's efforts to protect the pay, retirement,

and health care benefits earned by all government workers. As NARFE magazine states, the more meetings NARFE holds with legislators, the more it can affect their votes on NARFE issues.

We all need new ideas from time to time. Attending the training sessions and smaller group work sessions of the conference will help at all levels. You'll get tried and true ideas on invigorating other chapter members to advocate for all seniors, not just the few who work for various federal agencies. You will get ideas on how best to influence legislators and the general public.

Finally, you will meet others who share your values and face the same challenges you do. You will share tactics and strategies with them and discover how and what you can do to protect other federal workers and to affect legislation that affects the benefits you have worked for.

Registration for the conference is open until February 10. You can register online or get more information about the conference at www.narfe.org/legcon2017. You can get many questions answered through email by writing the Legislative Department at leg@narfe.org. Contact president Jerry Kursban (301-261-3329) to see if the chapter can help with carpool or other arrangements

What Can You Expect from the 115th Congress?

PATS

- 👉 Reforming the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP), which could reduce the WEP penalty for current and future retirees.
- 👉 Reforming the Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program.
- 👉 Reforming the process of determining how Medicare premiums are handled when low Social Security COLAs limit increases for some, but create greater increases for others, including many Civil Service Retirement System annuitants.

PANS

- 👉 Increasing the share federal employees and retirees pay for health benefits.
- 👉 Eliminating retiree health benefits for new hires.
- 👉 Lowering the rate of return on the Thrift Savings Plan's G Fund to near zero.
- 👉 Creating a de facto pay cut by increasing federal employee contributions to retirement by as much as 6 percent without increasing benefits.
- 👉 Eliminating the Federal Employees Retirement System annuity for new hires.
- 👉 Reducing the federal workforce through attrition by instituting a hiring freeze or limiting new hiring.

- 👉 Instituting pay freezes or limiting future pay increases for federal employees.
- 👉 Reducing merit-service principles and due process protections for federal employees.
- 👉 Calculating annuities based on the highest five years of service rather than the current high three years.
- 👉 Using the Chained CPI to measure changes in consumer prices, which reduces COLAs, Social Security benefits and annuities.
- 👉 Requiring postal retirees to enroll in Medicare or forfeit their federal health benefits.
- 👉 Converting Medicare to a voucher program, where beneficiaries receive financial support to buy private insurance in place of Medicare. Effects of House and Senate interaction and how this option would affect federal health benefits are not known.

Information on this page was taken from the NARFE magazine, February 2017.

Greater Bowie-Crofton Area NARFE News

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