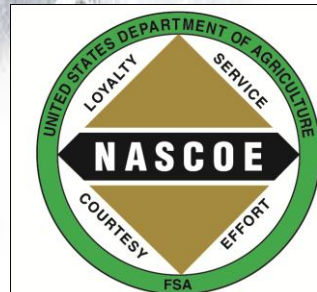


NASCOE NEWSLETTER
WINTER 2010/2011





The Road Ahead

Myron Stroup

NASCOE President

I hope this winter edition of the NASCOE Newsletter finds everyone well and that you have enjoyed the holiday season and time spent with family and friends. It could have been happier and merrier without the pay freeze but we all still have much to be thankful for. And since I brought up the subject of pay freeze, I will devote this article on two topics, our employee benefits and the upcoming farm bill debate.

In the past several months, as well as the months to come, our employee benefits will be debated. You will read articles both pro and con. Several bills were introduced this year to freeze employee's pay, reduce employee pay, reducing number of vacancies that can be backfilled, reducing the federal workforce, and changing from a high 3 to a high five in the retirement annuity calculations. Many of these, when presented before congress, were political in nature. In an attempt to send the message that federal spending has to be reduced. Discussions on employee benefits catch my attention and cause me concern just as it has many of you. Do you think that federal spending has gone too far? Do you think we should do our part in reducing federal spending? That is a personal question that only you can answer. NASCOE has been watching these issues unfold and issued an action alert in regards to our employee benefits.

The November 2010 elections were historical, electing a huge wave of new members, unseating some long standing incumbents, unseating some members who, in the eyes of the voters, overspent. The November elections will send a large group of freshman to Congress. Many members were elected based on two things, reducing the size of government, and reducing federal spending. The full effect of this historical election has not been realized yet. NASCOE is watching this very closely.

Will the pay freeze be the last attempt to reduce federal spending through employee benefits? I hope so, as well as you hope so. NASCOE will be watching. I hope the pay freeze is the only contribution we are asked to make.

The November elections also had a large effect on the debate concerning the next Farm Bill. The election basically 'reset the clock' so to speak on the Farm Bill discussions. This law determines what programs are available to producers, or the work we do every day in the county office. The leadership of the House changed from Democratic control to Republican control, changing the Chairmen of the House Agriculture Committee from Congressman Peterson to Congressmen Lucas. Peterson wanted to complete the next Farm bill in 2011 and Lucas wants to complete it in 2012. The main roadblock in crafting the next farm bill is funding. All the Commodity groups and Agriculture Organizations realize

funding will be very limited. This will have a tremendous effect on the program and services available to producers, and a tremendous effect of the work we do every day.

Many of you read the articles posted every day in agriculture publications regarding farm bill discussions. Many of you have read that the dollars funded in the current farm law for the direct payment program is being questioned. High land prices and high commodity prices have been used as some of the arguments to eliminate the direct payments. In addition, during some state agriculture organizations policy meetings, they have moved to support elimination of direct payments and move those funds, approximately 5 billion dollars, to enhance crop insurance as the premier safety net for growers. Our job of having programs and services to deliver every day is the largest employee benefit we have.

NASCOE has been monitoring the developments and changes in the political landscape daily since the November elections. At this point it is too early to take a firm position. It is too early to determine if the spending philosophy will actually change or not. Our broad based position, that programs and services should be delivered in the most cost effective and efficient way possible, will continue. It appears at this time the 112th Congress will be looking at all ways to reduce spending and most programs and services will be scrutinized.

The road ahead in 2012 will be bumpy, and at times unpleasant. I want to assure you, NASCOE will continue to work hard on your behalf.



How can we be better at this?

By

John R. Lohr

NASCOE Vice President

December 2010

In early December, your NASCOE leadership team consisting of officers and area executive committee members made one of our regular visits to the national office to discuss NASCOE member issues with FSA management. Not surprisingly, budget shortfalls were a common thread in many of the discussions.

Our first meeting on this trip was with Administrator Jonathan Coppess. After discussing all of NASCOE's items of concern, the Administrator was very sincere in asking for our help with two vital areas:

Training

NASCOE and the Administrator agreed that reduced budgets will not allow much use of the popular face-to-face training method. We also agreed that we are underutilizing many of the training tools currently available to us.

The Administrator wants to hear your training recommendations.

For example, during our December meeting, I made the following suggestion for an improvement to the webinar method of training:

Webinar training could be divided into 3 parts: overview, examples, and procedure.

The **overview** would be an introduction of the topic at something like the fact sheet level. This training would not only serve as the initial training for the responsible staff but could also be an excellent cross-training tool for program technicians and orientation for county committees.

The **example** portion could be simulation of the process needed to take a typical producer's program enrollment. This level would be loaded with examples of the process from start to finish and be as simplified as feasible. Role playing between a producer and PT could be used here.

The **procedure** level webinar would be for the staff's use as they get more involved with the program and need procedure with the detail at the handbook level. These detailed webinars would remain on the shelf for use as needed.

Cost Savings

To no one's surprise, a shortage of funding for salary and expenses continues to be a serious problem. Administrator Coppess wants to hear ideas from field-level employees about ways to streamline and save money. With the lion's share of FSA's resources out in our county offices, this is the place where even small efficiencies can equate to very significant savings.

Please email your good ideas about streamlining, cost savings, and training to me at john.lohr@pa.usda.gov and I will forward them on to Administrator Coppess.

Thanks in advance for helping make a difference.



Secretary Notes:

Happy Holidays Everyone! December is such a busy month especially this year with our NASCOE Management Meeting. WDC is one of my very favorite places to visit whether it's business or pleasure. Being able to see the sights and sounds of WDC in December was a pleasure. Sure it was cold, but since I just left two – three feet of snow in the Buffalo area, I had nothing to complain about. The decorations were everywhere even in the Ag Building. It was nice to see that the WDC employees took the time and were allowed to make their work areas festive.

I thought our meetings were very productive. This is the first time that I have been involved with a management meeting not related entirely to negotiations. Despite the reality of a drastically reduced budget, talks with all departments were an attempt to be pro-active. Your NASCOE Board asked many questions and offered several suggestions to our many concerns.

I would like to thank the many members that took the time to fill out a negotiation form regarding a concern(s) they had. To date I have received over 200. Several are duplicates, which indicate that the issues are not centralized but nationwide throughout the agency. The Pre-Negotiation Meeting is scheduled for January 16 & 17, 2011 in Sacramento, CA. I would like to encourage everyone to continue to submit their concerns even though the December 15th deadline has passed. I will make sure they are taken to the meeting and discussed. Please email them to me at ahymana@aol.com.

I would also like to also mention to please take a minute or two check out the 2011 NASCOE Convention page on NASCOE's website. Texas has done a phenomenal job in planning next year's convention and registration is now open. Why not register now and get a room in the main hotel? Herb, Penny, and TASCOC have promised a great time for all!!

In closing I would like to wish everyone and their families a blessed holiday season. So many times we tend to get wrapped up in all the hustle and bustle and commercialization of the season, that we forget the true meaning of the season. May this be the year we remember the true meaning of the season.



Happy Holidays and God Bless,

Annette M. Hyman

NASCOE Secretary

Treasurer Information!

Budget
7/1/2010 through 6/30/2011 Using 10/11 Budget

12/15/2010 Page 1

Category Description	7/1/2010 Actual	- Budget	6/30/2011 Difference
INCOME			
09-10 member dues	22,532.50	22,533.00	-0.50
Emblem sales	180.00	750.00	-570.00
Interest Inc	1,987.64	7,000.00	-5,012.36
jm donations	9,831.04	9,831.00	0.04
member dues	160,743.75	404,000.00	-243,256.25
YTB Income	148.53	1,275.00	-1,126.47
TOTAL INCOME	195,423.46	445,389.00	-249,965.54
EXPENSES			
10 Natl Conv	23,762.74	27,000.00	3,237.26
2011 Nat Conv	328.10	30,000.00	29,671.90
2012 Natl Conv	454.60	1,500.00	1,045.40
Ads	75.00	150.00	75.00
Annual Report	747.69	748.00	0.31
Area Chairs - conv	8,250.00	10,850.00	2,600.00
Awards	2,565.43	5,280.00	2,714.57
Awards-Schol-Emblems Co	645.84	980.00	334.16
Bank Charge	0.00	100.00	100.00
Benefits Committee	140.19	500.00	359.81
Cap Wiz	19,800.00	19,800.00	0.00
Computer	4,355.47	5,875.00	1,519.53
Conf call -execs	884.37	2,300.00	1,415.63
Conservation Co Testimony	2,223.47	2,224.00	0.53
Emblems Acct	762.00	750.00	-12.00
Exec board to leg conf	0.00	8,000.00	8,000.00
future committee	9,035.01	9,035.00	-0.01
Gifts Given	721.72	1,000.00	278.28
Holden Mtg	220.00	220.00	0.00
Insurance, Bus	0.00	4,543.00	4,543.00
Leg awards	429.97	1,430.00	1,000.03
Leg Co Org mtg	4,136.66	5,000.00	863.34
Leg consultant	45,627.94	96,200.00	50,572.06
Leg full conference	0.00	75,000.00	75,000.00
Legal, prof fees	3,859.00	7,200.00	3,341.00
Legis Committee	106.29	400.00	293.71
Legis fly in	0.00	12,500.00	12,500.00
Membership 1st time conv	0.00	5,000.00	5,000.00
Membership Committee	619.51	1,125.00	505.49
Membership Jump Teams	0.00	12,000.00	12,000.00
mtg w management	4,988.10	6,000.00	1,011.90
NAFEC Promo	0.00	250.00	250.00
Neg mtg	0.00	4,000.00	4,000.00
Newsletter	6,543.25	16,000.00	9,456.75
Office	131.97	200.00	68.03
PAC promo cost	267.60	267.00	-0.60
PAC travel	3,993.15	7,500.00	3,506.85
Peterson & DAFO mtg	2,749.54	2,750.00	0.46
Postage and Delivery	2,110.93	2,700.00	589.07
Pre-neg mtg	1,155.32	24,000.00	22,844.68

12/15/2010

Budget
7/1/2010 through 6/30/2011 Using 10/11 Budget

Page 2

Category Description	7/1/2010 Actual	- Budget	6/30/2011 Difference
Programs Committee	0.00	100.00	100.00
Publicity awards	1,326.70	4,500.00	3,173.30
Publicity Committee	174.67	1,115.00	940.33
Reorg mtg	12,932.16	12,000.00	-932.16
Special meetings	0.00	3,536.00	3,536.00
Stipends	2,724.00	5,262.24	2,538.24
Supplies, Bus	163.68	1,500.00	1,336.32
Tax, Business			
Fed	538.92	1,000.00	461.08
State	50.00	50.00	0.00
Other Tax, Business	0.00	0.00	0.00
TOTAL Tax, Business	588.92	1,050.00	461.08
Travel - Area conv	1,359.23	5,200.00	3,840.77
Travel - state conv	5,552.12	15,000.00	9,447.88
travel website	0.00	22.00	22.00
Utilities			
Internet	3,659.36	7,500.00	3,840.64
Telephone	0.00	0.00	0.00
Other Utilities	0.00	0.00	0.00
TOTAL Utilities	3,659.36	7,500.00	3,840.64
WIFE conv	285.30	0.00	-285.30
TOTAL EXPENSES	180,457.00	467,162.24	286,705.24
OVERALL TOTAL	14,966.46	-21,773.24	36,739.70

12/15/2010

Net Worth - As of 12/15/2010:2
As of 12/15/2010

Page 1

Account	12/15/2010 Balance
ASSETS	
Cash and Bank Accounts	
CD 5-26-09	106,418.51
General fund checking	179,110.82
new CD 6-29-10, 75K	75,390.85
Ohio Legacy 3-26-08	40,750.46
Ohio Legacy CD 1-4-09	109,444.54
Scholarship	32,758.25
TOTAL Cash and Bank Accounts	543,873.43
TOTAL ASSETS	543,873.43
LIABILITIES	
	0.00
OVERALL TOTAL	543,873.43



NASCOE Treasurer
Shelly Odenkirk

ATTENTION: NASCOE Members

For members that have never attended a Legislative Conference, NASCOE will be holding a contest. You can fill out the [1ST TIME Contest Form](#) and send it to NASCOE Treasurer Shelly Odenkirk for an opportunity to have your expenses to the legislative conference paid by NASCOE.

FORMS ARE DUE TO THE NASCOE TREASURER

SHELLY ODENKIRK

PO BOX 114

WOOSTER, OH 44691

BY JANUARY 15, 2011

**REIMBURSEMENT WILL BE ACTUAL EXPENSES ACCORDING TO
NASCOE TRAVEL POLICY NOT TO EXCEED \$1000.**

Only 7 forms have been returned so far, so the odds are good for those entering the contest....time is running out!!



MEMBERS NAME _____

STATE AFFILIATE _____ AREA _____

E-MAIL _____ PHONE _____

_____ I CERTIFY THAT I HAVE NEVER BEEN TO A NASCOE NATIONAL CONVENTION OR NASCOE LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE.

_____ I CERTIFY THAT I AM SIGNED UP FOR CAP WIZ

_____ I CERTIFY THAT I AM A NASCOE MEMBER IN GOOD STANDING I WOULD LIKE TO ATTEND THE 2011 NASCOE LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE BECAUSE:

_____.

SIGNATURE

DATE

FORMS ARE DUE TO THE NASCOE TREASURER SHELLY ODENKIRK, PO BOX 114, WOOSTER, OH 44691 BY JANUARY 15, 2011

REIMBURSEMENT WILL BE ACTUAL EXPENSES ACCORDING TO NASCOE TRAVEL POLICY NOT TO EXCEED \$1000. UPON COMPLETING MY TRAVEL CLAIM, I WILL BE CERTIFYING THAT BY RECEIVING THIS TRAVEL EXPENSE COMPENSATION FROM NASCOE, I WILL NOT BE RECEIVING MORE COMPENSATION FROM ALL SOURCES (NASCOE AND MY STATE AFFILIATE) THAN MY ACTUAL EXPENSES WERE FOR ATTENDING THE LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE.

Thank You NASCOE Members!

Do any of the following descriptions fit you??

- You are an experienced FSA employee and NASCOE member who has been paying your dues for many years.
- You are a new employee who has been a member of NASCOE since you started working.
- You are an employee with many years of service who only recently joined NASCOE.
- You are a faithful dues paying member of NASCOE but have never been involved in any state or national office.
- You have just recently joined NASCOE.
-

If you answered yes to any of those statements I want to take a moment to thank you. Your membership is very important even if the only thing you do is faithfully pay your dues. Sometimes we never stop to thank all of the good dues paying members who make the efforts of the association possible. Were it not for your dues, NASCOE would be unable to negotiate with management on your behalf, NASCOE would be unable to employ a negotiating consultant in Washington DC who works for you, NASCOE would be unable to keep on retainer an attorney when the need arises, and NASCOE would be unable to provide the many scholarships, awards, and benefits for its members.

In some of our states the membership numbers are lower than we would like to see them. Other states are struggling with participation and the development of new leaders. In an effort to encourage these states, your executive committee will be experimenting with Membership Jump teams during the coming year.

The concept of a Membership jump team is to encourage states and their members. The Jump team plan would typically include 5 or 6 NASCOE area or national leaders making a personal visit to the jump team state. These NASCOE leaders will be working with states leaders to formulate a plan to hold a meeting in the state, visit offices in the state or provide other support as mutually determined. We hope to have three jump team meetings during the coming year in three different areas, the Southwest area, the Northwest area and the Northeast area. If a jump team meeting is held in your state I want to personally invite you to attend and encourage others to do so as well. I believe you will receive good information and encouragement by attending these jump team meetings.

As the next Farm Bill is debated it will be extremely important to maintain a strong NASCOE membership. Every state association is needed to present a unified NASCOE message to Congress. If you can find time to not only pay your dues but to also give back to NASCOE with your time and/or talents it will be greatly appreciated. NASCOE is always looking for a few new, energetic leaders.



May God bless you and your family,

Kevin Dale, NASCOE

SWA Executive Committee Member



Glass Half Full
Charlene Neukomm
MWA Exec

For several years, NASCOE has been working on PT Reclassifications. A task force was established and has worked very hard to create three new position descriptions for FSA management to consider.

Recently PM-2783 was issued, announcing a new pilot program for a Key PT Position. Although this is not identical to any of the three positions, it is a start. It shows that FSA Management knows that complexity exists in the field and is willing to work with NASCOE. Please keep in mind it is a pilot position for one year, a trial if you will. It will be necessary for at least ten states to request and use the position in order for the FSA folks in WDC, working with FSA State Offices, to see what parts of this position work well and what parts need improvement.

On December 8, your NASCOE Executive Committee met with Michael Wooden, the Deputy Administrator of Field Operations, DAFO. We talked to him specifically about this position. He believes in this position. He sees definite positives with it, although he admits there will be some bumps in the road with it. Ultimately, the position will need to be used in states before those bumps can be identified. He indicated that the need for this position should be driven by the need of the field offices, not by the state office. He also stated that this position should not be viewed as a state office assistant.

The notice indicates that each state with less than 8 districts may request one Key PT position, while states with 8 or more districts may request two Key PT positions. According to Wooden, this limit of positions is for use during the pilot time period. If it is decided that this position will become permanent, the number limit of these positions could change. Ultimately, the availability of this position will be budget driven within each state.

Notice PM-2783 is somewhat vague and leaves open much interpretation by the states. I have heard many questions and concerns from members concerning this position, but we need to work with our state offices to get this pilot off the ground. It is a step in the right direction. It is a foot in the door for future positions in the field. Is our glass half full or half empty? I believe our glass is half full.





Your MEMBERSHIP - Make a Difference!

Patsy Wiles, NEA Executive

I am a member of NASCOE because I work for the Farm Service Agency. I can't imagine working here and not being a member! That would be like;

- Being an American and not celebrating the Fourth of July,
- Being a farmer and not driving a tractor,
- Or being a believer and not going to church.

I go to work and I have a good job because NASCOE has made the Farm Service Agency a better place for you and me to work.

You elected the NASCOE Executive board along with the many committees and they work very hard in some way every day for the betterment of FSA. And...let's remind them, and ourselves of the good things that we sometimes take for granted about our jobs that have been accomplished by the hard work of NASCOE members; our leave, health insurance, and flex schedules, just to name a few. These are not entitlements just because we're with USDA. As county office employees, we're the beneficiaries of the agreement negotiated, renewed, and signed each year by NASCOE AND FSA management.

I have just returned from the NASCOE meeting in Washington, DC as your representative. This annual session is held every fall, and serves as an opportunity for both NASCOE and FSA leaders to cultivate good working relationships. NASCOE takes members concerns to the table and successfully negotiates them.

By being a member you may be attending the upcoming Legislative Conference in March 2011. We go to Capitol Hill to represent all FSA members and non-members. We are all in this together working for the American farmer and our opportunity to serve them in the best way we can. It is so important to keep our organization strong so we have a voice at the table of ideas.

There are exclusive benefits for NASCOE members. The many benefits that are offered through JM Marketing, theme park discounts, cell phone discounts, NASCOE travel benefits, and the list goes on and on.

Being active in your state association and NASCOE is so important for you. NASCOE represents "Loyalty, Service, Courtesy, and Effort". NASCOE is our only voice to FSA management and to congressional leaders on issues that affect our employment. Please consider your option to become a member if you are not. You can make a difference!

Each year during the Holiday Season is the time when we pause to give thanks for the many blessings we've received, and look forward to a brighter tomorrow. Wishing you peace, hope, and all the joys of the season!

There is more to freezing than the winter weather

On December 3rd, 2010, 11 of the 18 members of President Obama's National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform voted "For" the final Commission report which contained proposals to cut federal civilian and military retirement by \$70 billion over 10 years. The proposal shifts an increasing share of health premium costs to federal workers and retirees, freeze federal pay and reduce the federal workforce by 10 percent.

If 3 more Commission members had voted "For" the report it would have required Congress to immediately consider the report. Even though this didn't happen, most experts agree that the reports spending cut and revenue provisions will be a part budget debate when it resumes in January 2011. That is to say, federal employee and retiree benefits will remain in the bull's eye for deficit reduction proposals.

We have already seen the immediate effect of the report with Congress approving the President's proposed federal pay freeze for 2011. The pay freeze coupled with the 7.3% increase in 2011 health insurance premiums, actually results in a pay cut. In the last three years the FEHB rates have increase by a staggering 24%. And there is nothing in site to reverse this trend.

As the new session of Congress begins a number of proposals await their consideration. They range from a two week furlough for federal employees to hiring freezes. There is no question that spending cuts will be made. NASCOE will be working hard to ensure employees jobs, pay and benefits will secure in the upcoming budget debate. The NASCOE Executive Board has fully funded the upcoming legislative conference. It's imperative that each state does everything possible to get as many members to Washington as possible. Our success has always been with the grassroots relationship our employees and farmers have with Congress. Make plans now to attend the 2011 NASCOE Legislative Conference in March.....your job may depend on it!



Perry Dykes

SEA Exec





November Meeting with Management
by Cindy Hall, NWA Executive Committee person

December 6, 7 & 8, 2010 your NASCOE Executive Board met with several members of management in Washington DC.

Monday we had an Executive Board meeting at the hotel until about 3:30, and then headed over to the USDA building to meet with our Administrator, Jonathan Coppess. The bulk of this meeting was following up on the convention questions and answers that had not been "fixed" since the convention. It also gives us all a chance to visit about the state of things in our county offices and ask questions in an informal atmosphere.

On Tuesday morning we met with Phil Short, DAM, Kim Graham and Karl Keller from the Midas project, Rob Haughton and Ken Hill from the Strategic Standing Committee, and Jim Gwinn from ITSD.

We discussed the leasing process with Phil Short. He told us that county office employees will be given an opportunity to take an online course and be able to help with the leasing project, which could speed things up. It is a free course that anyone can take. SED's have the information on how to take this course.

Rob Haughton discussed the FY2010-2015 Strategic Plan. One of the goals is to improve performance plans to make them more relevant to our jobs. They hope to have the plan published by February. They are working on a website to solicit input from the field. Their job is to be an advocate for us.

We discussed the problem between tenths and hundredths in GIS and Terra with Jim Gwinn. He wants to wait until we are converted over to Thin Client because it will work better, but it will take a little longer than if they made the changes now and then had to change it again later.

After lunch, we had some discussion with Heidi Ware and Bob McGrath about ARS and budget. They reminded us that there are Q & A's available on the BPMS website and that if we have specific questions about activities, we can send emails to BPMS.

Carolyn Cooksie, Associate Administrator, talked about Cultural Listening Sessions. One of her goals is to look at all position descriptions by FY 2012 to make sure they reflect what we actually do. She said she will be soliciting input from the field in this process. We also discussed some of the training issues with Carolyn. She said that FSA has an entire training branch and she would look into seeing if they could require that the program people and the training branch people work together before training is released to the field.

There was discussion regarding directions that are in the handbooks. Carolyn indicated that she felt as though our handbooks should be restructured so we weren't including information that wasn't essential, as policy. An example might be that there is a space on a form for a telephone number, but the omission of a telephone number shouldn't be cause for a finding on a COR report.

We finished out the afternoon by meeting with Brandon Willis and Craig Trimm. We discussed various program issues, including problems counties are having with CARS.

Wednesday morning we met with Michael Wooden, DAFO and his staff. He is a great supporter of NASCOE, having been a member when he was a CED in Virginia. We again discussed some of the items that were unfinished from the convention.

We discussed some of the problem with the way the performance software works. Michael understood because he had experienced the same problem. He will talk to HRD about this, but EmpowHR is not FSA software.

He also mentioned that the rating process is "under construction" for an overhaul. Things should be very clear after the new process for 2012.

All in all, I felt it was a productive meeting and it's always good to discuss these issues with management face to face.



NASCOE Winter Awards, Scholarships and Emblems newsletter article.

Greetings from snowy and bitter cold Wisconsin! Our cars are still starting the heater is working after several minutes of warming up the cars engines! I spoke to a friend of mine in Puerto Rico, and she said "Tom, I just can't comprehend what you mean by below zero temperatures – we were at 70 degrees once and we were all very cold!"

I hope all of you are signed up to get the alerts when the latest edition of NASCOE Now is posted! If not, please go to www.nascoe.org and simply click on the Sign Up Now button on NASCOE Home page. NASCOE Now has up to the date information concerning Awards, Scholarships and Emblems (not to mention all of the other information you want to know!). My Area Chairpersons and myself will try and get information to you in each edition of NASCOE Now to make sure you are current on all the deadlines, emblem specials, and scholarship programs available to you and your family members.

The new gold plated NASCOE President and Past President Pins are finally here! I was able to get a really good deal, so they are only \$20.00 each (compared to the \$45.00 last go around). Please contact me (oasen@charter.net) if you would like to order some of these pins for your State President and/or Past State President. I also have a few Secretary Pins left and one Treasurer Pin left – they however are still are at \$45.00 per pin (but they are worth every penny of it!!!). Just let me know.

Just another friendly reminder if you have not been able to catch the last few editions of NASCOE
Now for the upcoming deadlines:

NASCOE MEMBERS SCHOLARSHIP

March 1st Deadline for applications to reach the Area Chairperson
March 30th Deadline for Area selections to be completed.
April 1st Deadline for Area Chairs to notify the Area winners

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARDS

Deadlines:

February 1 Nominations submitted to the State Awards Chairperson
February 20 States MUST have selections completed
February 20 State winners MUST be submitted to the Area Chairs
March 15 Area Awards selections MUST be made
March 15 Area Chair MUST submit the winners to the National Chair
March 20 NASCOE Awards Chair will order plaques
April 1 Area Chairs shall notify the winners and the person writing
 The nomination
April 15 The NASCOE winners MUST be selected
May 1 The NASCOE Chair shall notify all winners, Area Exec's,
 And the person submitting the nomination
June 20 NASCOE Awards Chair will order plaques

SCHOLARSHIP's (both the traditional and NASCOE Members Continuing Education Scholarships)

Deadlines:

March 1 State Applications MUST be submitted to the Area Chairs
March 30 Area selections MUST be completed
April 1 Area Chairs shall notify the winners
April 15 Area winners MUST be submitted to the NASCOE Chair
April 20 NASCOE Scholarship Chair shall print certificates
May 30 NASCOE winner selection MUST be made
June 10 Notify the NASCOE winner and the Area Exec

PROFESSIONAL IMPROVEMENTS AWARDS

These Awards can be submitted throughout the year to the respective State Awards Chair.

THERE ARE NO DEADLINES!!!!

SICK LEAVE AWARDS

These Awards shall be submitted at the various levels of recognition. **THERE ARE NO DEADLINES!!!!**

EXTRA MILE AWARD

These Awards can be submitted throughout the year to the respective State Awards Chair, then to the Area Awards Chair, then to the National Chair who will issue the certificates.

THERE ARE NO DEADLINES!!!! THERE IS NO JUDGING!!!!

Don't forget to visit the NASCOE Store frequently for special deals and other fantastic offers! The web site is www.nascoeemblemsonline.com . If one of your co-workers was so kind as to give you a NASCOE Store gift card this year the current sales going on will get you plenty of goodies for your gift dollars! Happy shopping!

I wish all of you, your families and friends a very wonderful and memorable Holiday Season! Enjoy everyone!

Respectfully submitted,



Tom Oasen, NASCOE Awards, Scholarships and Emblems Chairperson



Legislative Report December 2010

First and foremost the legislative committee would like to wish you and your family a Happy Holiday season and hopes for a prosperous new year.

Your legislative committee has been busy responding to inquiries into what is happening to our benefits in recent days. It appears much of what we have worked for in the past is being threatened because of dire budget circumstances. Many of our members have been communicating their concerns with our committee, and those remarks have not gone unnoticed. We have heard that many members are willing to forego a COLA this year because we all need to do our part in balancing the budget. Others are adamant that they deserve a COLA because it is such a small part of the overall budget, and the earmarks added to recent legislation are costing a whole lot more than a COLA for employees. The Committee determined that we would distribute a Cap Wiz on the issue and those opposed to the freeze could send the alert and those in favor could forego sending the letter. We discovered that our alert was sent by about 50% of our normal responders. The committee believes that our benefits will continue to be a target for reductions in the name of budget savings. The committee will continue to monitor proposed impacts to our benefits, keep the executive board informed, and will issue Cap wiz alerts and responses as directed by the board. The responses of the membership about potential issues that impact members are extremely important. We hope you help us stay informed about these issues with your timely responses and notifications. Please feel free to notify any member of the legislative team on these issues through any of our email addresses on the legislative web page.

During our meetings in Hot Springs the membership directed our team to pursue solid workload items to add to our responsibility. The membership directed the legislative committee to pursue primary point for acreage reporting, yield history reporting, conservation administration and other program duties that could be performed by FSA such as claims management. Since that time CARS has been released and many insurance agents are seeking level 2 authority to load the reports. Farm groups have been announcing policies supporting a move to more risk strategy programs and discontinuing direct payment programs. Conservation responsibilities continue to grow for NRCS and decrease for FSA. As we prepare to make our assault on Washington DC on March 6th through 8th we are looking into ways to promote our Agency and the work ethic of our employees. In addition, the committee wants to explore every avenue possible to forward the agenda set out by the membership. Our position papers are very fluid and will not be finalized until very close to the legislative conference. We apologize for this and we will try to have them ready as soon as possible. We plan to do a thorough review of our message in DC before the visits, and we have confidence that YOU all will do an excellent job in delivering our message in this process. Look for more information on this full scale legislative conference from your area leaders in the near future.

The changes taking place in Congress require us to be alert and to be responsive as legislation is introduced or even being discussed. There are many new faces on the Ag Committee and on Ag

Appropriations. Anyone that has a close personal relationship with any of these new members please let someone on the legislative committee know. If you know a committee person or producer that has that close personal relationship please see if they are willing to be a conduit for information from NASCOE to the new member. We need to foster existing relationships with these folks and generate new ones. The committee is creating a list of these critical contact connections to help us to address quickly any movement on farm bill and budget issues. These contacts will be critical as we move forward. We have been having constant discussions with Bob Redding to keep us abreast of the pulse of the incoming congress. A lot of the information that Bob has been able to provide has not been very positive. The most disturbing is there could be as much as an \$8 billion dollar shortfall in funds available to write the next farm bill. This type of shortfall could set the stage for major cuts in the programs we implement. These potential shifts in programs due to budget constraints make it critical to have a strong NAFEC organization that can speak directly to congress about the importance of our programs. For this reason the legislative committee is planning an aggressive initiative to grow NAFEC membership. Chance Fenoglio is the point person for the legislative committee on this issue. We will need every CED and PT to become involved in helping Chance get the message out to our COC members. Our goal is to have on average at least one member in every county office in the country. The NAFEC and NASCOE leadership are both jointly committed to this project due to its major importance for our future. Anybody that has suggestions or can provide assistance to Chance should contact him at this email address rcf7754@yahoo.com.

As we read more about all of the cuts, freezes, and reductions that we as FSA employees face not only in our salaries, but in the programs that we administer, our legislative tools grow in importance. There are many representatives that are in favor of cutting out direct payments, cutting staff and slashing budgets and even doing away with the farm program completely.

With this type of mind set, it is extremely important for us to unify and present a clear message on the importance of federal farm programs and those who implement them. If ever there was a time to stand together, now is the time!

One way we can have our voice heard, and make our association stronger, is to participate in the NASCOE P.A.C. The bigger we grow our P.A.C. the louder our voice becomes! We need to work to enhance those tools that will make our association stronger in the legislative arena. The NASCOE P.A.C. is one tool that we have that is crucial to support legislators that carry our message. If you are a member of our P.A.C. THANK YOU and if you are not a member of the NASCOE P.A.C., JOIN TODAY! If you sign up to contribute as little as \$3.00 per pay period (only \$1.50 per week) you not only make a huge difference in our growth progress, but you will be eligible to win one of 5 - \$100 bills at the 2011 National Convention in Corpus Christi Texas!

Signing up is easy! You can go to the member's log-in page on the NASCOE web page, and it will walk you through it, or contact your NASCOE Area Legislative Chairperson for assistance. The goal for 2011 is to increase participation to 8% of our membership. Charla Daly will be in charge of the P.A.C. program on behalf of the legislative committee this year. State presidents

and state legislative representatives contact Charla for assistance in setting up enrollment tables at state and area events. Charla's email address is charladaly@yahoo.com.

The NASCOE web page legislative information continues to evolve, thanks to the talents of Deb Esselman. Links have been added for producer groups, market information, [stock quotes](#), and ag publications in the hope that Congressional staffers will use our page as a resource for other information that they need for agricultural policy, and in the process be reminded of who we are and what we do. These are located below the Legislative tab under "links and a lot more." The next step is to add [relevant position papers](#) to the website, so that those on the "Hill" can view them or refer to them as well as the NASCOE membership. Please understand that some papers must be kept confidential until released, and that these [position papers](#) are not yet written at this point. Additionally, the legislative page is where members can still find information on CAPWIZ, PAC, TSP information, legislative activity reports, the upcoming legislative conference in March and information on their area legislative chair.

We will be continuing to modify the legislative page, both in appearance and structure. Suggestions are always welcome and can be emailed to Rob Gallinger in [New York](#) at rgallinger@yahoo.com

No group, team, association or organization is successful without the active participation and involvement of its members. We are facing a time when our livelihoods may rest in the fact that we have members that are willing to pick up a phone, send a letter or Capwiz Alert, meet with their representative, or make a donation to the NASCOE PAC. We have many employees that do these very things, but drastic times call for drastic measures, and we need ALL members to not just sit idly by, but take an active approach to protecting our livelihoods. We encourage each of you to get involved.



Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and God Bless

Submitted by Mike Mayfield and Terry Stehr on behalf of The Legislative Committee



Special Benefits Report

by Tony Augustine, MWA Legislative Chair

The weakness in the economy and the size of the federal deficit has recently focused much public attention on federal employee's pay and benefits. Some studies from groups that want to shrink the size of government claim federal employees pay and benefit package is nearly twice as generous as the average for the general public. On the other hand, OPM states that federal employees pay is 24% below pay levels for comparable positions in the private sector. Unfortunately, we are now caught in the crosshairs of political maneuvering by both Congress and the Administration to have us "share the sacrifice" to help balance the budget during these difficult economic times. As Congress and the Administration move to stimulate the economy by increasing the budget deficit, in their next breath they call for a two year pay freeze for federal employees to decrease the deficit. This and many other ideas have surfaced on cutting the cost and size of the government that can affect our employee benefits including:

1. A two or three year freeze on COLAs. A two year pay freeze will save the government \$5 billion. Other ideas would completely freeze pay through no promotions, step increases or performance based awards. USDA employees' average salary is the sixth lowest of all federal agencies.
2. Reducing the federal workforce by 10% through attrition by a complete freeze on hiring or by allowing only one hire for every two persons that leave. Over the next five years, 60% of the federal workforce will be eligible to retire.
3. Unpaid furloughs for two weeks in 2011.
4. Changing retirement computations from using a highest 3 year salary average to the highest 5 year average. (Saves the government \$5 billion over the next 10 years)
5. Changing the retirement formulas so employees pay a higher amount toward their retirement cost.
6. Increasing employee's share of health insurance cost through use of a lower inflation index that will likely not keep up with increases in health insurance premiums.
7. Raising the retirement age.

It is likely that many of these cuts to our benefits will be considered by Congress early in 2011.

Recently, an extension of a tax reduction package was passed that includes a temporary 2% reduction of Social Security taxes for all Americans for 2011. This will help improve our take home pay, but the \$120 billion cost of this action will be taken from general revenue which increases the size of the deficit.

The two year pay freeze would not only affect you for just 2011 & 2012. It would have a permanent effect on your annuity when you retire. Consider the example of a PT making \$45,000 now with 20 years of service covered under FERS. Assuming an annual COLA of 2% and the employee retiring in another 10 years, a two year freeze on COLAs results in a significantly lower high 3 salary average which means the 30 year employee would get \$626 less for every year in retirement. For employees with less than 20 years service right now or for employees working longer than an additional 10 years, the effect of the freeze will be even greater.

Now is a more important time than ever, that we provide a strong, unified voice to our elected officials educating them on the importance of a skilled federal workforce and the threats that such proposals and cuts would place on that asset. NASCOE President Myron Stroup has recently joined forces with the National Active and Retired Federal Employee (NARFE) President Joseph Beaudoin and made NARFE alerts available to NASCOE members to act on accordingly. Please watch for these alerts in your home email.



PAC INFO!

Charla Daly, SEA Legislative Chair

As you read this NASCOE newsletter, I want you to pay special attention to all of the cuts, freezes, reductions, etc. that we as FSA employees face not only in our salaries, but in the programs that we administer. Many of these are “proposals”, but some have already become reality.

There are many representatives that are in favor of cutting out direct payments, cutting staff and budgets and even doing away with the farm program completely.

With this type of mind set, it is extremely important for us to unify and present a clear message on how important federal farm programs and those who implement them are. If ever there was a time to stand together, now is it!

One way we can get our voice heard, and make our association stronger, is to participate in the NASCOE P.A.C. The bigger we grow our P.A.C. the louder our voice becomes! We need to work to enhance those tools that will make our association stronger in the legislative arena. The NASCOE P.A.C. is one tool that we have that is crucial to help legislators carry our message.

If you are not a member of the NASCOE P.A.C., JOIN TODAY! If you sign up to contribute as little as \$3.00 per pay period (only \$1.50 per week) you not only make a huge difference in our growth progress, but you will be eligible to win one of 5 - \$100 bills at the 2011 National Convention in Corpus Christi Texas!

Signing up is easy! You can go to the NASCOE web page and click on the P.A.C. button; it will walk you through it, or contact your NASCOE Area Legislative Chairperson for assistance.

Do your part, support your agency and fellow employees and start your contributions today!

Washington Marriott at Metro Center

775 12th Street NW · Washington,

District Of Columbia 20005 USA

Washington Marriott at Metro Center is looking forward to hosting your event, NASCOE Legislative Conference, planned from 03/07/2011 to 03/09/2011.

1. RESERVATIONS PROCESS & BOOKING WEBSITE

Online and phone reservations will be accepted from 11/05/2010.

A dedicated booking website has been created for your event so your guests will be able to make, modify and cancel their hotel reservations online, as well as take advantage of any room upgrades, amenities or other services offered by the hotel.

To view the website, please click the following link:

https://resweb.passkey.com/Resweb.do?mode=welcome_ei_new&eventID=3099988

Legislative conference attendees can begin making their reservations now. The reimbursement per state is currently set at \$900. States will have to provide actual cost information to draw this amount. Any expenditure above the \$900 will be the responsibility of the state unless the state has obtained special approval from the executive board. There will not be anything planned until late afternoon Monday March 7, 2011. Tuesday will be a full day of training on our legislative positions. **ALL** hill visits are to be scheduled for Wednesday March 9, 2011. This is very important to increase our visibility on the Hill during our conference. Please start making your appointments as soon as possible. If you have further questions or need additional information please contact Mike Mayfield or Terry Stehr.



NASCOE stand on proposed Salary Freezes and Benefit Cuts
 State Summary 863 subscribers have sent a total of 2715 Messages
 As of December 20, 2010.

State	Count	Montana	10
Alabama	15	Nebraska	30
Arkansas	11	Nevada	1
California	4	New Jersey	7
Colorado	9	New Mexico	4
Connecticut	4	New York	28
Delaware	1	North Carolina	23
Florida	6	North Dakota	39
Georgia	16	Ohio	23
Idaho	4	Oklahoma	23
Illinois	64	Oregon	2
Indiana	18	Pennsylvania	17
Iowa	86	Rhode Island	1
Kansas	47	South Carolina	6
Kentucky	8	South Dakota	47
Louisiana	7	Tennessee	49
Maine	3	Texas	66
Maryland	2	Utah	8
Massachusetts	1	Vermont	6
Michigan	19	Virginia	14
Minnesota	35	Washington	5
Mississippi	19	West Virginia	2
Missouri	15	Wisconsin	53

Send updates to your CAP WIZ email addresses to: Tammy at siouxchick81@hotmail.com



Membership Report

Angie Bierman, Chairperson

Happy New Year!!! (Almost!)

I hope today finds you all wrapped up in the holiday spirit... Isn't it interesting how we work and prepare ALL year for Christmas and then in one day, it's done! Then 364 days to go... Hopefully you all have and will continue to keep in mind the TRUE reason for the season; not just on December 25th, but every day.

We are coming up on the deadline for 2nd quarter dues to be sent in. Please start reminding your states that January 10th is the date that dues need to be received by Shelly Odenkirk.

I have sent out a couple emails using the information from the database and it seems to be working well. I have only had about 300 out of close to 2000 emails returned because of an insufficient email address. I have contacted some members on my own and have had the help of my area chairs to contact others. We are narrowing down my list and getting new and updated email addresses. If you have been contacted and have not yet replied, please do. This will help insure that you are getting NASCOE information timely. You sure don't want to miss out on all that we have to tell you about! Also, if your home email address changes for any reason, please send me a note or contact your state or area membership chair so that they can get it to me and I can get it updated on the database. One more thing... As a reminder to state/area membership chairs... If you have a new employee or one that retires or leaves the agency, please let me know so that I can add them to or take them off my master database list.

As always, if you have comments, suggestions or concerns... Please don't hesitate to contact me. I appreciate whatever you have to say!

Here's to wishing you all the best in 2011!!



NASCOE Publicity Report

Tammy Eibey, Chair

As we enter into the New Year, the publicity committee is preparing for publicity contest with major changes that were recommended at the National Convention and approved at the fall organizational meeting. The new publicity handbook is posted on the website and is located under the publicity tab. Please review the rules and regulations regarding the changes. You may also contact me or one of the area chairs.

We are no longer having the 5 area contests and it will only be done at the national level. The categories remain the same in Best Overall Newsletter, Best Single Issue, Best Website, Best Feature Story Human Interest and Best Feature Story Humor.

Items that need to be submitted to the judges besides the articles or newsletters include the website certification form and the membership certification form.

Deadlines:

February 15th - Items must be received by the 5 area chairs and the National Publicity Chair.

March 31st – Scoring sheets are forwarded to National Publicity Chair in all categories.

April 30th - Notification sent to National Winners and announcement made

August 13th - Awards presented at the National Convention Banquet

- We are also working on the NASCOE Now's, Newsletters, facebook NASCOE News and the website. If you have pictures or articles to be added to any one of these publicity outlets, forward to me! I continue to work on issuing passwords for the member's only page on the site. Item to note on that: Use only home emails addresses and list your state. Thanks to Angie Bierman for helping with membership verification. Please be patient with this process as we do take time for personal issues other than NASCOE.

Happy New Year!

Tammy

WEBSITES

Websites have become an integral part of our lives with internet access. Like anything we use daily, we have certain expectations of each website that we access. Your NASCOE Executive Board is cognizant of these expectations and their goal is to have a professional website that meets the members' needs. I am honored to have the opportunity to provide such service for NASCOE as your webmaster. There have been many updates to the NASCOE site and all needed forms and deadlines are posted to the site. There are also new pages with information for employees and links to farm organizations, agency links and even links to the House and Senate. On the Home page there is a "news" section that shows the latest items that are updated so you don't have to search to find what is changed. Alerts go out when major items are added, but FYI, the website is updated almost daily, so be sure to take advantage of this source of information.

There is a "Member's Only" page that has specific information for members on available benefits and PAC. You will need to request a password for this page and please remember to USE YOUR PERSONAL EMAIL, NOT YOUR USDA EMAIL and list what state you are from.

Now here is a plug for the state websites. The webmasters struggle to create and maintain the sites for their respective states, but the members need to provide guidance and input to the webmasters as to what the state wants on the sites. This has been one of the biggest problems for all webmasters: lack of input. Without feedback, the webmasters truly maintain the sites blindly. I encourage members and the State Executive Boards to take the time to check out your state site and if there is something that needs corrected or added, please let your webmasters know. They won't take offense to your notes, quite the contrary; they will be pleased to know that the members are using the sites and have ideas to share.

Any state that has a website should be very grateful that you have a talented member willing to donate their time on behalf of your organization. Web design and maintenance takes a lot of time and I know there are many webmasters who feel they are struggling to provide quality sites without good feedback.

Be sure to visit the NASCOE website regularly for new updates at www.nascoe.org

Have a very Blessed Christmas and please keep our soldiers in your prayers.



*Respectfully Submitted,
Deb Esselman
NASCOE Webmaster*



Programs Committee

The National Convention in Corpus Christi, Texas is almost here! I hope to meet many of you this year and hope that you will take time out of your busy schedule to join everyone who comes. Corpus Christi is a really neat place with plenty of good food to eat.

I did not travel this fall to DC due to budget issues. However, I still maintain close contact with the National office through email. I have had many good issues come my way this year and we have already received some responses from the National Office that have given us what we asked for. It is encouraging to see some of the great ideas from the field be put in use. This grass roots effort is what keeps this Agency on its toes.

I will continue to encourage everyone to submit your request to your Area Programs Chairperson, for the SWA(TX, NM, OK, KS, UT, CA, HI, AZ, CO & NV) Mike McDonald mike.mcdonald@tx.usda.gov, for the NWA(WA, OR, ID, MT, NE, WY, SD, & ND) Linda Benzel lindabenzel@msn.com, for the MWA(WI, MI, MN, OH, IN, IA, IL, & MS) Rosemarie Gallagher rosemarie.gallagher@mi.usda.gov, SEA(KY, VA, AR, TN, NC, SC, LA, MS, AL, GA & FL) Patricia Sorensen patricia.sorensen@fl.usda.gov, NEA(CT, RI, DE, MD, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, VT, & WV) Sandy Truslow sandy.truslow@me.usda.gov or me at john.marquess@tx.usda.gov. If you are new at this and are unsure how this works let me explain. During your workday, you may encounter obstacles in implementing one of FSA's various programs and determined that there is a better process to accomplish the same goal. NASCOE provides a voice for this process so that your constructive ideas and solutions will be delivered to the National Office, to hopefully streamline program delivery. This is also an opportunity to voice your excitement and support for the processes that are working great, to hopefully encourage, similar types of strategies and ideas that are already successful. This opportunity that NASCOE offers is your communication line to the National Office from the front line. The Programs Committee is ready to assist you in delivering your innovative ideas so FSA may continue successful Farm Program delivery. As always I look forward to working with each of you.

Please check out the Programs Committee page on the NASCOE website to see the suggestions and responses we have received already.

I would like to thank Sharon Curtis, Howard Rood, Jake Bourget, who served as Area Programs Chairs last year, and Linda Benzel and Patricia Sorensen, who served last year and are still current Area Program Chairs, for all the wonderful help and hard work they provided to this committee over the last twelve months. I want to also welcome our new members to the Area Programs Committee, Mike McDonald, Rosemarie Gallagher, and Sandy Truslow. They have already been hard at work this year and I look forward to working with each of them.

I want to also thank the all the folks in DC who give their time and consideration to the ideas that the field offices provide to them. And special thanks to Craig Trimm, who helps route all of our ideas to the proper location for the Programs Committee. This partnership is very important to NASCOE.

I look forward to hearing your great ideas. I can still be reached by email at john.marquess@tx.usda.gov, by phone at (work) 254-386-3913, (work) 325-648-3118, (home) 254-386-5622, or (cell) 254-386-7949.



Thanks,

John Marquess

National Programs Committee Chair

My quote of the day-“Tell a friend about NASCOE

NASCOE Benefits Watch



Phil Morton, NASCOE Benefits Chair

Winter 2010

As we continue with our series on the FERS Retirement System, I urge you to be sure and read the “NASCOE Now” for information relating to other benefits and many other topics which may affect your life at work and at home.

The second part of the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) is the Basic Benefit plan.

Basic Benefit Plan

Eligibility Participation

If you were automatically covered by FERS, or you elected to transfer from the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) to FERS, you will participate in the Basic Benefit plan.

Vesting

To be vested (eligible to receive your retirement benefits from the Basic Benefit plan if you leave Federal service before retiring), you must have at least 5 years of creditable **civilian** service. Survivor and disability benefits are available after 18 months of civilian service.

Creditable Service

Creditable service generally includes:

- Federal civilian service for which contributions have been made or deposited.
- Military service, subject to a deposit requirement. To receive credit for military service, generally, you must deposit 3% of your military base pay. Interest begins 2 years after you are hired. With certain exceptions, you cannot receive credit for military service if you are receiving military retired pay. Also, see the note that follows on credit for National Guard service.
- Leaves of absence for performing military service or while receiving workers' compensation.

Unused sick leave is not converted into creditable service for any purpose. (There is a limited exception for CSRS employees who transfer to FERS.)

Credit is not allowed for civilian service after 1988 when no contributions were withheld.

Note: Service in the National Guard, except when ordered to active duty in the service of the United States, is generally not creditable. However, you may receive credit for National Guard service, followed by Federal civilian reemployment that occurs after August 1, 1990, when **all** of the following conditions are met:

- The service must interrupt civilian service creditable under the Civil Service Retirement System (or FERS) and be followed by reemployment in accordance with the appropriate chapter of the laws concerning Veterans Benefits; and
- It must be full-time (and not inactive duty), and performed by a member of the U.S. Army National Guard, or U.S. Air National Guard; and
- It must be under a specified law and you must be entitled to pay from the U.S. (or have waived pay from the U.S.) for the service.

The deposit for National Guard service that meets these criteria is limited to the amount that would have been deducted from your pay for retirement if you had remained in the civilian service.

Contributions

Your contribution to the Basic Benefit Plan is the difference between 7% of your basic pay and Social Security's old age, survivor, and disability insurance tax rate, or 0.80%.

Refunds

You may withdraw your basic benefit contributions if you leave Federal employment. However, if you do, you will not be eligible to receive benefits based on service covered by the refund. There is no provision in the law for the redeposit of FERS contributions that have been refunded.

Retirement Options

There are three categories of retirement benefits in the Basic Benefit Plan:

Immediate or Postponed , Early , or Deferred

Eligibility is determined by your age and number of years of creditable service.

Benefit Formula

How your benefit is calculated:

Your benefit is based on your "high-3 average pay." This is figured by averaging your highest basic pay over any 3 consecutive years of creditable service.

Generally, your benefit is calculated according to this formula:

$$\frac{1\% \text{ of your high-3 average pay}}{\text{times}} \times \text{years of creditable service}$$

If you retire at age 62 or later with at least 20 years of service, a factor of 1.1% is used rather than 1%.

To determine your length of service for computation, add all of your periods of creditable service, then eliminate from the total any fractional part of a month (less than 30 days).

Depending on the category of retirement benefits you receive, your benefit may be reduced as described in the Retirement Options section. For example, the total could be reduced if you elect to retire at the minimum retirement age before completing 30 years of service.

Special Retirement Supplement

If you meet certain requirements, you will receive a Special Retirement Supplement which is paid as an annuity until you reach age 62. This supplement approximates the Social Security benefit earned while you were employed by the Federal government. You may be eligible for a Special Retirement Supplement if you retire:

- After the Minimum Retirement Age (MRA) with 30 years of service;
- At age 60 with 20 years of service; or
- Upon involuntary or early voluntary retirement (age 50 with 20 years of service, or at any age with 25 years of service) after the U.S. Office of Personnel Management determines that your agency is undergoing a major reorganization, reduction-in-force (RIF) or transfer of function. You will not receive the Special Retirement Supplement until you reach your MRA.

If you transfer to the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) from the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS), you must have at least one full calendar year of FERS-covered service to qualify for the supplement.

If you have earnings from wages or self-employment that exceed the Social Security annual exempt amount (\$9,120 in 1998), your Special Retirement Supplement will be reduced or stopped.

Survivor Benefits

The Basic Benefit Plan provides benefits for survivors of Federal employees and retirees.

Spouse

If you die while you are an employee...

If you are married, have 18 months of civilian service, and die while you are an active employee, your surviving spouse receives:

A lump sum payment
plus
the higher of 1/2 of your annual pay rate at death
or
1/2 of your high-three average pay.

The lump sum payment, which increases by cost-of-living adjustments each year, is \$21,783.34 in 1998.

If you had 10 years of service, your spouse also receives an annuity equaling 50% of your accrued basic retirement benefit. These benefits are paid in addition to any Social Security, group life insurance, or savings plan survivor benefits.

To be eligible for benefits, you and your spouse must have been married for at least 9 months, or there must be a child born of the marriage, or your death must be accidental.

If you die while you are a retiree...

A married retiree's annuity is automatically reduced to provide spouse survivor benefits unless those benefits are jointly waived in writing by the retiree and the spouse before retirement.

Your annuity is reduced 10% to give your surviving spouse:

An annuity of 50% of your unreduced benefit
plus
a special supplemental annuity payable until age 60, if your spouse will not be eligible for Social Security survivor benefits until age 60.

You and your spouse may choose instead to have your annuity reduced by 5% to give your spouse an annuity of 25% of your unreduced benefit at your death.

Separate provisions apply to spouses of disabled annuitants.

Former Spouses

A former spouse may receive survivor benefits as provided in a retiree election or a qualifying court order.

Children

If you have 18 months of civilian service and die while you are an active employee, or if you have retired, your children may be eligible to receive an annuity. This benefit is payable to each unmarried child:

- up to age 18;
- up to age 22 if a full time student;
- at any age if the child became disabled before age 18.

The amount of the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) benefit depends on the number of children and if the children are orphaned. In 1998 the FERS surviving child benefit is \$344 per month per child for each of three children; \$413 if orphaned. The total children's benefit is reduced dollar for dollar by any Social Security children's benefits that may be payable.

Disability Benefits

FERS disability benefits can help you replace part of your income if you are unable to work for a prolonged period.

What Does Disability Mean?

You are considered disabled under FERS if you are unable to perform useful and efficient service in your position because of disease or injury. However, you will not be considered disabled if you decline your agency's offer of a position which accommodates your disability and is at the same grade or pay level and is within your commuting area.

You may also qualify for Social Security disability benefits if you are unable to work in any substantial gainful activity.

Eligibility

To qualify for FERS disability benefits, your disabling condition must be expected to last at least 1 year, and you must have at least 18 months of creditable civilian service.

Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLA's)

Survivors and disability retirees receive a COLA regardless of their ages; however, disability retirees receiving 60% of their average pay do not receive a COLA during the first year. All other retirees begin to receive COLA's at age 62.

The Special Retirement Supplement for retirees is not increased by COLA's; the supplement for survivors is increased by COLA's.

Form of Payment

FERS Basic Benefits are a monthly annuity that is paid the first business day of the month after it accrues. For example, the payment for December is made on January 2.

Stay tuned for more on the FERS Retirement System , continuing with the Thrift Savings Plan in next issue of the NASCOE News Letter or visit www.opm.gov for more information on retirement and other employment related issues. The preceding information has been provided courtesy of OPM



Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from TASCOE!

Wishing you a Christmas filled with cheer
and many warm wishes for the coming year.

May the Christmas season fill
your home with joy,
your heart with love,
and your life with laughter.

When Santa has his duties fulfilled,
looking forward to a relaxing, warm beach is a thrill.
He hopes to see you for some *“Sea, Sun, and Fun”*
and to renew old friendships, as well as new ones just begun.



NASCOE Convention

Corpus Christi, TX

August 11th – 13th, 2011

Omni Reservations 1-800-843-6664

Be There!

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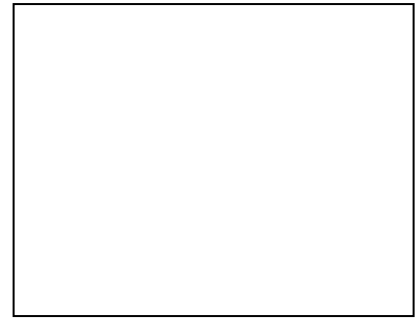
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CHANGE SERVICE REQUIRED



Pass Around!
Be sure all employees are given the opportunity to read this newsletter. Please allow your County Committee this opportunity as well.

VISIT THE NASCOE WEBSITE
AT:
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