



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FSA USDA COUNTY OFFICE EMPLOYEES NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF RETIRED ASCS-FSA USDA COUNTY OFFICE EMPLOYEES

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EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

The 109th Congress of the United States attempted passage of several pieces of legislation supported by NASCOE and RASCOE. NASCOE and RASCOE applaud those Congressional Representatives supporting this legislation. It is hoped that the 110th Congress will, at a minimum, address the inequities described below;

- ❖ **Social Security Windfall Elimination Provision.** The formula for calculating a federal employee's retirement under this provision reduces the earned annuity by as much as 60%. HR 82 and SB 206 introduced in the 110th Congress address this inequity.
- ❖ **Government Pension Offset.** The law requires two-thirds of a government annuity be offset from a spousal social security benefit. HR 82 and SB206 also correct this situation.
- ❖ **Retirement.** Federal County Office Employees dedicate their career to serving the Agricultural Community with a promise of certain retirement benefits. Many federal employees would be very disappointed if Congress made a change in the retirement formula at this time.
- ❖ **Cost of Living Adjustments.** The 1990 Federal Employee Pay Comparability Act was designed to equalize pay between federal and non-federal workers within 10-years. The average pay for FSA employees lags 8 to 12% behind comparable jobs in the private sector. Congress needs to act to correct this disparity.
- ❖ **Health Insurance.** NASCOE and RASCOE support several changes to the health insurance programs offered our employees. Items of concern include; premiums continue to rise approximately 10% each year, non-participants should receive monetary compensation, the age of discontinuing coverage for dependents should be raised from 22 to 25, the law should allow retirees to use pre-tax dollars to pay health costs (H.R. 1110 provides this correction for our retirees), and we support the availability of affordable dental and vision coverage. Our membership is counting on Congress to assure that our employees carrying health insurance during the last 5 years of their federal employment maintain eligibility for full health benefits into retirement. Your support of legislation addressing our member's concerns for improved health insurance benefits will improve working conditions for all federal employees.
- ❖ **Leave.** Federal Employees covered under the Federal Employee Retirement System (those hired since 1/1984) should be rewarded for conserving their sick leave. We support removal of the requirement that GS and CO employees be from the same employee system to utilize donated leave. Finally donated leave should not be limited to annual leave.
- ❖ **Liability Protection.** Congress must act to revise 7 CFR Subtitle A to include former USDA employees. Employees leaving USDA should be protected from lawsuits generated from actions taken during their official employment.

❖ **Whistleblower Act.** Federal Law, Title 5, U.S.C. Sec 1213 and Sec 2302, provides a secure channel for current, former, and prospective federal employees to make confidential disclosures of the following: abuse of authority, violations of law, gross mismanagement, waste of federal funds and evidence of specific danger to public health and safety. Federal Law also protects these groups from retaliation related to any persons that have filed a whistle blower complaint. Title 7 Employees (non-federal County Committee employees) should be afforded the same protection offered other Federal Employees under the Whistleblower Act. This oversight could be addressed by Congress by including our members in the Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act (H.R.985) and the Executive Branch Reform Act (H.R.984).

NASCOE and RASCOE ask that Congress consider ways to make federal employment more comparable to the private sector. We believe enactment of legislation to address the above issues will allow USDA to continue providing the high quality of service the farm community has become accustomed to, and to continue to attract high quality employees in the future.