

NARFE 101 NEWS

NATIONAL ACTIVE & RETIRED FEDERAL EMPLOYEES

Augusta Chapter 101

NARFE CHAPTER 101, P.O. Box 3993, Augusta, GA 30904-3993



NARFE

National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association

October 2010



My how the weather has changed! I know there will be some hot days, but summer is over and it is so pleasant this time of year. It is also the time that you should be planning to vote or take advantage of absentee or early voting for the November 2, 2010 General Election. South Carolina has "absentee voting." You must meet one of 17 reasons for voting absentee, one of which is that you are sixty-five years of age or older. Qualified voters may vote absentee in person or by mail, so you can vote early in South Carolina. In Georgia, early voting has started and will continue at some locations until October 29. "We the People..." need to vote!

Our September Evening Dinner Gathering went very well. Past President Bill Richardson will lead the Nominating Committee, so if you would like to help with the operations of our Chapter, please let Bill know. He is listed in the column on the right side of this page.

Jennifer Wedincamp and Bill Richardson will work together to try and get dates and a location at Fort Gordon for our Chapter 101 Holiday Party in December. The membership voted to pay for half the cost of the Holiday Party from Chapter funds and will be planning for a date on a Tuesday or Thursday during the first two weeks or so of December. More information will be provided as the details are developed.

We had a discussion at our September meeting about various news articles appearing in the print and broadcast media about studies comparing the salaries in the private sector to those of federal employees. I was asked to prepare a response to address these unfavorable reviews and to attempt to provide some information to the casual reader as to the basis for some of the "conclusions" and "inferences" incorporated into some of these articles. I did write a response, but I have not released it because the "dust" seemed to be settling. I learned a long time ago to "never argue with someone who buys ink by the barrel" or who broadcast with more than 1,000 watts of power. But, I just saw another article in the *New York Times* and it seems that the "buzz" is going to continue, perhaps even after the November election. So, I am including in this edition, both an excerpted summary of the recent article from the *Times* and a response I had prepared to the "reports" that started this recent blitz of attacks. The *Times* article is aimed at active federal employees, and it should serve as a reminder that our benefits need the protection of NARFE!

****Ralph Angelo, Chapter 101 President



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Perspective on Apples & Oranges

Many recent commentators, such as the conservative think-tanks, *The Cato Institute* and *The Heritage Foundation* and the national newspaper *USA Today* have published pieces titled “Federal Pay Outpaces Private-Sector Pay” (Cato), “The Case for Federal Employee Compensation Reform” (Heritage Foundation) and “Federal workers earning double their private counterparts” (*USA Today*). I have read these pieces and many more regarding employees pay and benefits. I am a retired federal employee with more than 37 years of experience working in the “public” sector.

A health care facility is a great place for comparing private vs. public sector jobs because there is a common basis for comparison. You can, for example, look at how much a not-for-profit hospital, a for-profit hospital, a state hospital or a federal hospital pays Registered Nurses. That is a great “apples to apples” comparison because each is competing for a licensed individual, with a defined skill set, in a similar work environment. You may not be able, however, to include those RN’s who are working in private office practice because that kind of data and the work environment can be very different.

One can make similar comparisons with other “professionals” competing in similar markets, such as Pharmacist, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Physical Therapist and others. One can also get a close correlation on the pay of hospital house-keeping employees and hospital food service workers, although you can’t fairly compare them to folks with similar jobs in local hotels. Those are different levels of responsibility, with very different compensation processes.

The critics don’t try to limit the comparisons they do to such highly “comparable” jobs. They line up the average compensation of all federal employees (well perhaps not the CIA, FBI or National Security agents) versus that of the private sector across the board. The jobs from top to bottom at McDonald’s and the jobs at Microsoft all are allegedly averaged together to come up with an average private sector annual pay of \$42,635.

But look at the employment data about Microsoft. They appear to have an average salary of \$89,667 and a salary range from \$23,296 to \$1,075,000. They don’t seem to include janitors or food service workers, clerks or receptionist within their ranks. But we don’t think that Microsoft is “overpaying” the folks they do employ. (Refer to website address : www.jobs-salary.com/microsoft-salary.htm)



Express. Their employment data shows an average salary of \$41,158 with a salary range of \$19,198 to \$109,620. I found no listing for hourly associates, which I must assume makes up the bulk of the employees at the stores. The persons in this listing appear to be corporate and regional management and support for this national fast food chain. (Refer to website address: www.jobs-salary.com/panda-express-jobs.htm)

Most of us would guess that the fast food industry has lower pay and benefits than the computer software industry. Why then, do we have so much trouble comprehending the salaries of federal employees? Many of the lower graded positions within the federal sector have been contracted out to the private sector, thereby impacting on the average salary of both the private and public sector. Many positions that haven’t been contracted out, have been downsized as a result of computerization and automation.

Most conservative think-tanks constantly recommend that more government jobs be contracted out to the private sector to perform because that would allegedly cost less. Some have recommended that the Air Traffic Control System of the FAA be contracted out. Does anybody really think that the private sector can hire air traffic controllers at a significantly lesser cost? Isn’t that pretty much the same as saying that United Airlines overpays pilots and that Delta Airlines can hire them for less? The basis for federal employees’ compensation levels has much to do with the kinds of specialized skills employed and how much competition there is for those skills. Some may be quite comparable, such as registered nurses working in health care delivery; others may be quite unique to the public sector, such as nuclear engineers in the NRC or air traffic controllers in the FAA. But please know... an average is not necessarily the right basis for an equitable comparison.

I have included the web addresses that I have used to review some of the pay data in the public sectors. The following is a source for federal sector pay: http://php.app.com/fed_employees10/search.php There may be others as well.

Ralph Angelo, President, NARFE Augusta Chapter 101

Flash Point in Midterm Vote

By **Lisa Rein** (Staff research editor Alice Crites contributed to this report) Excerpted from an article published in the Saturday, September 25, 2010 *Washington Post*

From her sixth-floor office at the National Science Foundation in Arlington County, Carter Kimsey earns \$155,500 a year helping to conceive and oversee federal research grants to the nation's smartest scientists. Kimsey doesn't see herself as overpaid. But now, the 63-year-old civil servant and almost 2 million other federal workers are in the cross hairs during this midterm election season. With 14.9 million Americans unemployed and private-sector wages stagnant, Republicans hoping to win back Congress in November have seized on the salaries and size of the federal workforce as symbols of overspending by the Obama administration.

In their campaign blueprint released this week, GOP lawmakers proposed a hiring freeze on non-security federal workers to help slash \$100 billion in government spending. On Capitol Hill, they've tried to block President Obama's proposed 1.4 percent pay increase, to furlough federal workers for two weeks to save \$5.5 billion, to fire workers who owe federal taxes, to shrink the pool of political appointees, to freeze bonuses and even to shut down the government. None of these ideas has gotten much traction in the Democratic-controlled Congress, but the resurgence of a GOP majority after the November elections could change that. Democrats and unions are fighting back with a fury.

Republicans have focused on the swelling size of the workforce as what they say is evidence of an administration out of touch with the average American. "When you look at family incomes under \$40,000 per family, people look at federal workers making twice what they're making," said Sen. Tom Coburn (R-OK.), who as a member of Congress earns \$174,000.

"People are naturally going to have an eye toward some kind of fairness."

House Minority Leader John A. Boehner (R-Ohio) told a crowd in Cleveland last month in a speech on the economy: "We've seen not just more government jobs, but better-paying ones, too." Taxpayers are subsidizing 'fattened salaries and pensions of federal bureaucrats' who are helping choke the economic recovery," he said.

Under Obama, the civilian workforce has grown by about 164,000 jobs to a total of 1.9 million, according to the database FedScope. Eighty-five percent of those jobs are outside Washington, many in the congressional districts of members who are leading the curb-government fight.

Kimsey says she sympathizes with the GOP position - to a point. In her view, she's devoted her career to public service and passed up the opportunity to earn a much higher salary at a private science foundation.

Politically charged reports from conservative and liberal think tanks have inflamed the debate. They claim that federal employees are earning a "premium" of anywhere from 22 to 50 percent (depending on whether benefits are compared), a position contested by federal officials. The view is that new hires under Obama and the premium are helping to drive the deficit and discourage private investment that could boost the economy.

So are federal employees overpaid? It depends on who's measuring. Democrats say a public-private pay gap exists, but in the other direction: The government lags behind the private sector by 22 percent.

"If the American public knew the data that was the basis for these outrageous claims," said John Berry, the government's personnel chief, "they'd see how ideologically biased it is." With four out of five hires under Obama to defense and homeland security jobs and the Department of Veterans Affairs, "I'd ask, which one of those people would you like to fire?"

Critics cite data that compare all public and private jobs: Federal workers averaged \$123,049 in pay and benefits last year, while private workers totaled \$61,051. Because the government workforce is more skilled on the whole than labor used by private companies that include McDonald's and Wal-Mart, comparing all jobs skews private-sector salaries down, government officials say. The government sets pay scales based on what private employers in different regions pay for comparable levels of work and experience.

A government lawyer generally earns less than a corporate one.

When the same work levels are compared, private pay comes out ahead 22 percent, government officials say.

Data released by Berry's office do not offer a government average.



(Continued on Page 4)

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Federal Workers *(Continued from page 3)*

But the figures show that a novice government nurse earns \$46,148, more than a private one at \$39,215. More experienced government nurses trail behind the private sector - \$84,652 compared with \$124,239.

Today's workforce size is about the same as it was during the Kennedy administration. Thomas M. Davis III, a former Republican congressman

from Northern Virginia who chaired the committee that oversees federal workers noted that many bureaucrats "are running billion-dollar programs" and should be paid what they're worth.

Henry Brown, who earns \$90,000, says the government pays him what he's worth, especially with 23 years as a computer security expert. Yet three of his neighbors in Huntsville, Ala., earn \$10,000 more doing similar work for defense contractors. "There are so

many people who rely on us," said Tom Webb, a paralegal earning \$115,000 and president of Local 3615 of the AFGE. Webb is a Social Security employee who works on some of the 700,000 pending disability claims that pore in annually. "We're highly trained. We take very seriously what our mission is."

See the full article at::

www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/09/24/AR2010092406341.html

NO-HASSLE MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

By John R. Clements, Director of Membership

NARFE Headquarters has approximately 240,000 members who renew their membership on an annual or multi-annual basis. To facilitate the collection of these dues, NARFE has implemented a thorough dues-collection system. Here's how it works:

Two months before the member's expiration date, the **first renewal** notice is mailed. The envelope is clearly marked **First Renewal Notice** and looks like it contains a bill. In the notice's remarks section, the member is encouraged to go on dues withholding. The envelope also includes a dues-withholding application form and a neon orange card that promotes dues withholding as the overall cheaper alternative. The envelope is mailed at the non-profit rate.

The **second renewal** goes out the month the member's membership officially expires - after a full 12 months -

and is marked **Second Renewal Notice**. This is noted in chapter reports especially so that chapter leaders can make every effort to contact the members who have received this notice and get them to renew. Dues-withholding information is not included in this notice. If the member still hasn't responded, he or she will receive a "cover wrap" on their *NARFE* magazine that announces "...this is your last issue." The member is coded **dropped for non-renewal**. This is reflected in another chapter report, and again, your chapter leaders will make every effort to contact the member and get him or her to renew. In addition, a special report is sent to every chapter membership chair or chapter president that lists the lapsed members.

If there is still no response, the member receives a **Final Notice**, mailed First Class two months later. The NARFE dues-collection system is efficient and effective as 80 percent of members who receive the first renewal notice typically respond with dues payment.

Adapted with permission of FT Press, an imprint of Pearson.

Trent Hamm, author of *The Simple Dollar* and writer of the popular website thesimpledollar.com, says you can save and stay happy by following his simple rules:

Don't give up the things you love.

Thriftiness should never outweigh happiness. It can lead to happiness, however, by helping you save for the bigger goals in life that you've dreamed about.

Find inexpensive ways to enjoy what's most important to you.

You don't have to own the books you read or the movies you see. There's plenty of free music on your radio and computer. Public golf courses require no membership.

Cut back on anything not crucial to your happiness.

Save and Stay Happy

If you're not defined by the clothes you wear, give thrift shops a shot. Gourmet food may be central to your existence, but you can cook it in low-cost pots and pans.

Never go shopping without knowing exactly what you're getting.

Don't even enter a store without a plan or you risk purchasing something you don't need. And it's the things you don't need that sacrifice your dreams.

Use the "30-Day Rule" for purchases.

Jot down the item you're considering on a piece of paper, then give yourself a month to think about it. Use the time to find it at the lowest price - and to ask yourself if you truly want it. **If so, go for it!**

NARFE 101 NEWS

Alzheimer's Report

Louise Shay, Alzheimer's Chairman

Ever read a book that is hard to put down? Well, for the past couple of weeks, I have been reading one of those books. When Ralph went to the NARFE Conference, he brought me back a book, **MEASURE OF THE HEART**, that is like that. It is written by a daughter who is helping care for her father with Alzheimer's. This book really is reminder of what is the measure of any heart; our capacity for Love. There are more than 5 million people with Alzheimer's in the United States alone. Family caregivers should read this book. It is a window into the many challenges that they face for many years in caring for a loved one. There are touching and amusing events in the day-to-day activities that each experience. I will be glad to share the book.



Don't forget to mark November 6 for the Alzheimer's walk!

Sunshine Report

Linda Cratic, Chairperson

Get well cards have been sent to Barbara Duncan and Past President Mason Richardson. Mason is adjusting to a pacemaker and is taking some time to do that.



We received a suggestion about the Sunshine Report. The report is a good way for all of us to think and pray for those who are changing their living arrangements, are ill, have had surgery, are recovering, or have passed away. But wouldn't it be nice to add celebratory news to the Sunshine Report, like weddings, new grandchildren, retirements of employed members, alerts regarding important birthdays, special achievements and recognition, births of grandchildren, etc. We want to try this but we need input from all of the members when things occur. Please call Linda Cratic (706) 798-2716 or June Covar (803) 637-6570 with any "event" information that would be of interest to our members. We'll see how it goes!

A friend is someone who can sing you the song of your heart when you've forgotten it. - Unknown

Balance on hand last report: \$4,864.22

Receipts:

NARFE (dues) 168.18

Augusta VA FCU 75.00

Total receipts \$243.18

Total to be accounted: \$5,107.40

Expenses:

AlphaGraphics 143.78

Postmaster 100.00

Total expenses \$243.78

Balance on hand September 30, 2010 \$4,863.62

An unusual month, our expenses were only 60 cents more than our income

Treasurer's Report

Elaine Bollinger, Treasurer



NARFE 101 NEWS

Lee Winger (left) and Richard Boggan (right) and their spouses were welcomed to NARFE Chapter 101 at the September meeting. Both of these gentlemen retired from the VA Medical Center.

NEW MEMBERS



Chapter 101 Member Dr. Jean Embry (above) announced that she will hold a book signing at the Partridge Inn on October 3 at 4 PM. Her new book is entitled, "The 7 Brothers from Siesta La Prie." We wish her every success with this, her third book.



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High Stakes Election

LEGISLATIVE:

Democrats to stuff 20 bills into post-election lame-duck session

Excerpted from a web article in *The Hill* by Alexander Bolton - Julian Pecquet contributed to this article.

After two years of unified government - one party "controlling" both chambers of Congress and the White House - voters will determine if there should be a change. The November election could narrow the margins in Congress, or party control could change. Forty representatives are not seeking re-election. Twenty-nine are retiring or were defeated in primaries; 10 are running for the Senate; and one is running for governor. Twenty-three senators are seeking a new term. Fourteen senators are departing.

Democrats are considering cramming as many as 20 pieces of legislation into the lame-duck session they plan to hold after the November 2 election.

The array of bills competing for floor time shows the sense of urgency among Democratic lawmakers to act before the start of the 112th Congress, when Republicans are expected to control more seats in the Senate and House. But, given the slow pace of the Senate, it also all but guarantees that Democrats will be hard-pressed to pass even a small part of their lame-duck agenda.

The highest profile item for November and December is the tax cuts of 2001 and 2003, passed under President George W. Bush, which expire at year's end. Democrats have promised they will not allow tax rates to rise for families making less than \$250,000 a year.

Democratic leaders have also prioritized the defense authorization bill, which includes a repeal of the "Don't ask, don't tell" policy that bans gays from serving openly in the military. Democrats and gay-rights activists fear repeal could prove impossible if Republicans control the House or additional Senate seats. Bills that have been painstakingly negotiated may have to be overhauled if Republicans control the House next year or pick up half a dozen Senate seats. Sen. Dick Durbin (Ill.), the chamber's second-ranking Democrat, has promised to push for a vote on the DREAM Act, which

would give the children of illegal immigrants a chance to earn legal residence. That bill would have much less chance of passing if Republicans controlled the House.

Democratic leaders also view an extension of unemployment insurance benefits and a freeze in scheduled cuts to doctors' Medicare reimbursements as must-pass legislation. Lawmakers could spend much of the lame-duck session haggling over these two expensive proposals, which sucked up weeks of time in the Senate earlier this year.

Thousands of laid-off workers will begin to lose unemployment benefits after Nov. 30, and doctors are scheduled to see a 23 percent cut in Medicare reimbursements on Dec. 1.

Conservative Blue Dog Democrats in the House may demand the cost of the so-called "doc fix" to be offset with spending cuts.

Deals that were made to satisfy retiring senators will become moot, and an incoming class of as many as 19 freshman senators could raise fresh objections.

All pending bills die at the end of a Congress and must be reintroduced at the start of a new two-year term.

This means lawmakers will have to repeat the laborious process of holding committee hearings, markups and rounds of private negotiations before legislation is brought to the floor again in 2011 or 2012.

If Congress returns to Washington the week after the election and works right up until Christmas, it would have six weeks to pass legislation - assuming a week off for Thanksgiving, as is tradition.



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benefits. We're working hard to
preserve them!*

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NARFE 101 NEWS Visit the Chapter 101 Web Site: www.narfe.org/chapter101



NARFE Augusta Chapter 101 **October Lunch Meeting** will be at Noon on Tuesday, **October 19** at First Baptist Church of Augusta, 3500 Walton Way, Augusta, Georgia, at the rear of the campus in the Activities Building. Come and join us! Lunch is \$9.50 at the door. Please make checks payable to: "NARFE, Chapter 101" or have the exact change, if possible. Please plan on arriving about 11:40 a.m. or earlier so that you may have paid and are ready to go through the buffet line at Noon.

Reservations are required in order to get a count of the number of meals to prepare. Make your reservations **no later than** October 18 at Noon by calling the Recording Secretary: Donna Germany (706) 855-9888 or e-mail her at dwgermany@yahoo.com. You just need to leave a message or send an e-mail, you will not receive a confirming call back.

