



# NARFE Questionnaire for Congressional Candidates

**The National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association (NARFE)** represents the interests of the 5 million federal workers, retirees, their spouses and survivors, 85 percent of whom live and work outside the Washington, DC, area. NARFE has 210,000 dues-paying members who live in every congressional district across the country. The organization has been safeguarding the earned rights and benefits of America's active and retired federal employees since 1921. For more information, go to [www.narfe.org](http://www.narfe.org) or call our Advocacy Department at **800-456-8410, option 3**.

*Please return this questionnaire to NARFE's Advocacy Department, at [advocacy@narfe.org](mailto:advocacy@narfe.org).*

---

## CANDIDATE INFORMATION

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Congressional District: \_\_\_\_\_

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Primary Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please attach a biography. Space for additional comments or explanations is provided at the end.*

---

## BACKGROUND ON THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE

Federal workers have dedicated their careers to serving their country and the American people. Eighty-five percent work outside of the Washington, DC, area. Two-thirds defend our homeland, enforce our laws, support our military and care for our veterans. Nearly one-third of federal employees are veterans themselves.

## HONORING COMMITMENTS

**I.** In exchange for years of hard work, federal employees and retirees were promised retirement annuities and retiree health benefits. These benefits were earned fairly, paid for by the retiree during their service and are essential to federal employees' and retirees' financial and health security. Yet recent proposals have taken aim at already-earned benefits for those in and approaching retirement. These include:

- Eliminating or reducing cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) for current and future federal retirees.
- Changing the calculation of retirement benefits – or eliminating portions of the retirement benefit – for those approaching retirement.
- Increasing the amount federal retirees must contribute toward their federal retiree health insurance premiums.

**If elected, would you (please check one):**

- Support such proposals or others that reduce the value of already-earned benefits for those in or approaching retirement
- Oppose such proposals or others that reduce the value of already-earned benefits for those in or approaching retirement
- Don't know

2. In 2006, the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act mandated the United States Postal Service (USPS) prefund 100 percent of its future retiree health benefits liabilities over a 10-year period. This accelerated prefunding schedule imposed an extraordinary financial burden that no other federal agency or private-sector company is required to bear, which remains on the USPS books.

This prefunding obligation remains the primary source of USPS' fiscal concerns. Rather than repeal or decrease the prefunding obligation, the leading postal reform bill, H.R. 756, would rely on postal retirees to fix USPS finances.

While the bill reduces the liability the USPS has incurred from this prefunding obligation, it does so by requiring current and future postal retirees to enroll in Medicare Part B or forfeit the Federal Employees Health Benefits program coverage they earned through their years of service. This would amount to an additional \$134 per month for around 76,000 individuals who previously declined this Medicare coverage and would shift \$10.7 billion (over 10 years) in benefit costs to Medicare.

NARFE strongly opposes this provision of H.R. 756 on behalf of its postal retiree members, who are covered by the same retirement and health benefit programs as other federal employees and retirees.

**If elected, would you (please check one):**

- Fix the USPS' budgetary issues by working to repeal or reform the prefunding requirement
- Fix the USPS' budgetary issues by forcing current retirees to enroll in Medicare Part B
- Other (please elaborate at the end)
- Don't know

3. Cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) to federal civilian and military retirement annuities, as well as Social Security benefits, veterans' benefits and disability benefits, currently are determined by the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W), which is computed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) at the Department of Labor.

The Chained Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (Chained CPI-U) is a different formula calculated by the BLS. A switch to using the Chained CPI instead of the CPI-W would result in an estimated COLA that is 3 percent lower after 10 years, 6.2 percent lower after 20 years and 9.4 percent lower after 30 years.

The Consumer Price Index for the elderly (CPI-E) is another formula calculated by the BLS. It measures the costs experienced by Americans age 62 and older. Notably, while health care accounts for about 12 percent of spending for those aged 62 and older, it accounts for only 6 percent of spending for the general population. A switch to using the CPI-E instead of the CPI-W likely would increase annual COLAs.

**If elected, would you: (Please check one)**

- Support using the Chained CPI to calculate COLAs to federal retirement benefits
- Support continuing to use the CPI-W to calculate COLAs to federal retirement benefits
- Support using the CPI-E to calculate COLAs to federal retirement benefits
- Don't know

## COMPARABLE PAY

4. The Employment Cost Index (ECI) measures changes in private-sector wages and salaries and is typically used to determine annual federal pay increases for federal employees. For 2019, the federal pay increase should be based on a 2.6 percent increase in the ECI.

Yet the president's budget for fiscal year 2019 proposes freezing federal pay in 2019. This follows a five-year period in which private-sector pay increased by 11.2 percent, but federal pay increased by only 7.3 percent.

Federal workers do not expect to make it rich through their public service, but they deserve competitive compensation.

**If elected, would you (please check one):**

- Oppose providing federal employees with pay increases in line with private-sector pay
- Support providing federal employees with pay increases in line with private-sector pay
- Don't know

## SOCIAL SECURITY FAIRNESS

5. There are two laws enacted in the late 1970s and early 1980s that affect federal retirees who are covered by the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS), and who also receive Social Security or Social Security widow(er)'s benefits. CSRS provides federal retirement benefits for individuals who began their federal service prior to 1984. Under CSRS, federal employees contribute 7 percent of pay toward their federal retirement annuity. They do not contribute to Social Security through payroll taxes, and therefore do not earn Social Security credits based on their CSRS-covered employment.

The first provision, known as the Government Pension Offset (GPO), affects federal retirees who apply for Social Security benefits for which they are eligible as a spouse. Under the GPO, the spousal or survivor Social Security benefit would be offset by two-thirds of his or her government retiree annuity payment. To understand what this means, a retiree receiving a monthly annuity of \$900 could apply for a Social Security widow(er)'s benefit of \$500. Since two-thirds of that annuity is \$600, the \$500 Social Security benefit would be completely offset and the retiree would receive no Social Security widow(er)'s benefit at all.

The second provision is the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP). The WEP reduces the Social Security benefit a federal retiree receives based on his/her Social Security-covered employment (e.g., private-sector employment before or after federal service). The Social Security benefit is reduced simply because the federal retiree is receiving a retirement annuity through CSRS. In 2017, the WEP reduced monthly Social Security benefits by as much as \$442.50 per month.

These issues affect not only federal employees covered by CSRS, but also state and municipal employees, such as teachers, firefighters and police officers who receive a pension based on work not covered by Social Security.

**If elected, would you (please check one):**

- Support legislation that would repeal or reform the GPO and WEP
- Oppose legislation that would repeal or reform the GPO and WEP
- Don't know

## MERIT-BASED CIVIL SERVICE

6. The modern civil service was created by the Pendleton Act, enacted in 1883. Before that, federal civil service was considered "at-will" employment, and most employees were given jobs for reasons of political patronage, not merit. This shift to the merit-based system allowed for a professionalization of public service and ensured that tax dollars were not wasted on unqualified political partisans.

For the past several decades, Congress or the administration has proposed a modernization of the federal workforce. While continued updates and improvements to the civil service system are necessary to implement best practices in performance management, many politicians have used this argument in bad faith as a way to attack federal employees and return federal employment to an at-will proposition. There is certainly a good case to modernize facets of federal employment laws to improve government operations and efficiencies. However, eliminating due process protections leads to the risk of returning the country to the spoils system and political patronage of the 1800s.

**If elected, would you (please check one):**

- Support a merit-based civil service with due process protections
- Oppose due process protections for federal employees
- Don't know

## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS: