

MISSOURI

NARFE NEWS

SHOW-ME STATE

NARFE
FEDERAL BENEFITS EXPERTS



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Recruiting & Retaining NARFE Members



EMERSON KRETZER
Missouri Federation President

Greetings fellow Missouri NARFE members, I hope this finds you all safe and in good health. I have written about membership in all my articles for the last few years. So more in this article too, because we are still losing more members than we are gaining. Our state membership now stands at 1240 chapter and 1342 national only for a total of 2582 members which is 50 less than my last article. So once again, I am challenging each one of you to try to recruit at least one new member this year. We must find a way to reach out to our younger federal employees in an effort to get them to join NARFE!! Our biggest selling point is that NARFE exists solely to protect the pay and benefits of federal employees only!! Please make a concerted effort to recruit new members to keep our association viable and with a strong voice to Congress.

I recently attended LegCon23 by zoom with Patricia Barrett, Craig Pettibone, and Elbert Williams. We had two days of informative presentations and also heard from some congressional representatives. NARFE's primary goals this year are (1) WEP/GPO repeal or reform, (2) Full Cola's and (3) Protecting the pay and earned benefits of federal employees and retirees. We were then able to meet with three of our congressional reps aides Andrew Gilstrap, Legislative Asst for Rep Sam Graves, David Gans, Legislative Asst for Rep Ann Wagner, Kyle Upton, Legislative Asst for Rep Mark Alford and one senator's aide Janna Davis, Legislative Correspondent for Sen Josh Hawley. I discussed the WEP/GPO, Patricia discussed Equal Cola's and Craig discussed the earned pay and benefits cuts. I'm just disappointed we couldn't meet with the rest of our congressional representatives and senator. Legislation focused on was H.R. 82 with 288 cosponsors - Social Security Fairness Act of 2023. We currently only have three cosponsors from Missouri, Rep Sam Graves, Rep Emanuel Cleaver, and Rep Blaine Luetkemeyer out of eight representatives. S. 597 with 44 cosponsors, we have no MO senators on this bill. H.R. 866 with 34 cosponsors- Equal Cola Act, we have no MO representatives on this bill and there is no current bill in the Senate. H.R. 1002 16 cosponsors-Saving the Civil Service Act, we have no MO cosponsors on this bill and S. 399 with 15 cosponsors with again no MO senators on this bill. As you can see we have our work cut out for us to get our MO representatives and senators on board with this vital legislation. Please use the NARFE Advocacy on the national website to reach out to your representatives. For an FYI on WEP/GPO nationally affected WEP is 2 million and MO is 41,904 and GPO nationally is 734,601 with MO 16,770 as of Dec 2022, the latest figures we have. We also heard of an (RSC) Republican Study Committee made up of more than 150 lawmakers in the House of Representatives, put out a budget proposal for fiscal year 2024 titled -Protecting Americas Economic Security, and guess what!!! They are proposing significant cuts to the pay and benefits of federal employees and retirees, along with changes to Social Security. I think we have given enough over the years and it's time to find other ways to cut spending without reducing our pay or earned benefits. The old saying goes -THE SQUEAKY WHEEL GETS GREASED, and I think it's time for all of us to start squeaking to Congress. The louder

and more persistent our voices are, the more likely we are to be heard and accounted. Please use the NARFE national website to find all this information I have presented to you and get involved before it's too late. Thanks in advance for all you're doing to help.

In August, I will be traveling to Alexandria, VA for the Federation Presidents meeting and the annual NEB meeting. I have been asked to lead the Federation Presidents meeting since we will be hosting the national conference in St. Louis next year. Hopefully everything goes well. We are also looking for

anyone that would be willing to be a Federation Officer as we have elections coming next year. We would be willing to mentor anyone willing to step up and take a position in the federation.

In closing, please recruit new members and be proactive with our congressional representatives. This affects all of us. May God bless you all and keep you safe and healthy till we meet again. Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions or concerns you may have. This organization belongs to all of us and benefits all of us!!!

Keep in Touch: Update your Email Address with NARFE

LAURA COWART
Immediate Past President

Greetings Missouri Federation NARFE members, I hope you have had a great summer and are looking forward to Fall. We've had some hot days but looking forward to a hopefully cooler Fall.

Due to the free MO Federation newspaper being received in your mailbox later than you have in the past, I wanted to let you know that you can always read the latest minutes and other pertinent information on our Missouri Federation website www.monarfe.org I know many of our members do not have access to a computer or have an email address but if you do, please take advantage of the site.

In addition, I encourage all of you that do have an email address to contact NARFE HQ and add your email address. With this email, HQ can keep you up to date with anything happening on Capitol Hill that affects YOU, the federal worker active or retired. It also provides you with immediate contact to your Legislative Action Center (LAC) where you can reach out to your federal legislators. The LAC has made it easy for us to add a personal note to an already prepared letter. There are several letters that address the issues we face and NARFE has made it simple for us to contact our Missouri Federal legislators.



Did you know that NARFE also archives the Federal Benefits program webinars? These may be found at www.narfe.org/webinar-archive. These webinars go back to January 2019 and include videos, slides and transcripts of questions and answers from each session.

The monthly NARFE magazine is now online too, as well as opportunities for you to join various communities in FedHUB. There is no additional cost and it's easy to join communities that are of interest to you.

Our next "in-person" State Conference will be held in 2024. The time & place committee is working hard to make it a successful conference. Stay tuned for more information as it becomes available. The "in-person" conference will also install new officers. Whether you are a National only member or a National/Chapter member in good standing you should consider running for a position. Our Federation is only as strong as the folks who are willing to put in the time and effort to make it so. *As an aside, the Federation Executive Board voted unanimously at our July board meeting to hold our State Conference in St. Louis in conjunction with the National Confer-*

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- Federal Long Term Care: 1-800-582-3337 • www.LTCFEDS.com
- Thrift Savings Plan: 1-877-968-3778 • www.tsp.gov
- Social Security: 1-800-772-1213 • www.ssa.gov
- Members Records (Email or Address Change): 1-800-456-8410 • memberrecords@narfe.org
- National NARFE website: www.narfe.org
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- Congressional Voting Records: www.votesmart.org • www.issues2000.org

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GUIDELINES FOR PUBLICATION

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Contributor's Instructions: *The Missouri NARFE News*, The Official Publication of the Missouri National Active and Retired Federal Employees will be in print every third month (tri-monthly). To ensure a quality product we need help and support from you, the members. Material may be edited for grammar, clarity and length. Because of the volume, they will not be acknowledged. Please use the following instructions as a guide for your article submissions. If you have questions please feel free to contact the Editor.

It is incumbent on all federation officers to submit appropriate articles and pictures of events occurring in their area of responsibility. Chapter officers and members are encouraged to submit brief articles and pictures of general interest about Chapter happenings.

Please identify the event and the individuals in the picture and mark the Chapter number on the back of each photo. Photos cannot be returned, so you should not send originals. Articles related to legislative matters and recruiting techniques are especially encouraged. All materials should be submitted to the Editor, Mary Lamping, 117 N. Van Buren Ave, Kirkwood, MO 63122, or MLMary47@gmail.com. You are encouraged to use email as much as possible to submit your articles. Articles should be submitted in MS WORD or WORKS (either by mail or email attachment) to the Editor. If you cannot submit in Word or Works, copy and paste the article in the text of an email. Typed, single-spaced material is also acceptable. In order to meet the publisher's deadline, the editor must receive material no later than the date published in the Editor's box on the next page.

Privacy: The Federation respects your privacy and will do everything to protect it in the *Missouri NARFE News*. The Federation Executive Board has adopted a policy to only print individual names and phone numbers, but not mail or email address (except the Federation Executive Board). Contributors should be aware and comply with this policy when submitting your articles.

Federal Income Tax: Dues payments and gifts or contributions to NARFE are not deductible as charitable contributions for federal income tax purposes. Membership dues include subscription to this newspaper.



The Missouri NARFE News

2023 PUBLICATION SCHEDULE

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Email

(Continued from page 1)

ence in August....more details with be coming soon.
 The NARFE National Conference will be held in St. Louis, MO in August 2024; the first time the conference has been held in the Midwest. Our Federation is looking forward to working with the National Committee to make this an outstanding conference.

As I look at our membership numbers each month, I see we are continuing to lose members. Please reconsider your decision. There are (2) different ways in which you

can renew your membership, actually (3) if you would like to go on Dues Withholding and have it taken out of your annuity. But for those that do not wish to use this avenue of payment, here are the ways you can renew: 1) Call toll free 800-456-8410 or login to www.narfe.org. It would be helpful if you would have your membership # readily available, but not necessary.

Finally, FEEA (Federal Employee Education & Assistance Fund) don't forget to donate to this organization. It

has been around for 37 years and been a lifeline to 60,000 federal families, be it a pandemic, government shutdown, medical emergency, disaster, or a child's educational needs. In 2022 they aided over 500 families.

You have several options to donate, logon to www.narfe.org, complete the form in your NARFE monthly magazine or go direct to their website at www.feea.org/give. Let's continue to support our federal families.

National Legislative Report



CRAIG PETTIBONE
 Acting Legislative Chair - Nat'l

As acting Legislative Chair, I recently emailed key St. Louis staff for Senators Josh Hawley and Eric Schmitt a copy of the June-July edition of *NARFE Magazine* (NARFE_06-07-2023_web.pdf). Key staff copied on my email included Ben Gruender, Deputy District Director for Senator Hawley; Morgan Corder, Director of Field Operations for Senator Eric Schmitt; and Marianna Deal, Senior Advisor for External Communications. Sharing *NARFE Magazine* with key legislative staff helps us keep them up to date on NARFE benefits expertise and legislative priorities.

There are several pending legislative proposals which merit the attention of MONARFE CDLs and Chapter Legislative Chairs. I urge all CDLs and Chapter Legislative Chairs to visit the NARFE Legislative Action Center, www.narfe.org/advocacy/legislative-action-center/, to thank their representative--or urge cosponsorship of--this important legislation. I also urge them to ask their chapter members to do the same.

WEP/GPO Repeal. The Social Security Fairness Act of 2023, H.R. 82/S. 597, which would repeal the windfall elimination provision (WEP) and the government pension offset (GPO), has received tremendous bipartisan support early in this Congress. The House bill, H.R. 82, has already garnered 287 cosponsors, a majority of the 435 House lawmakers, and only 3 shy of the 290 cosponsors needed to trigger the House Consensus Calendar rule process that would require either committee advancement or a floor vote.

Equal COLA Act. H.R. 866, would ensure federal retirees maintain the value of their retirement annuities, earned through careers in public service. It would do so by providing full cost of living adjustments to Federal Employees Retirement System retirees, correcting the unfair policy that caps Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) annual cost of living adjustment (COLA).

Saving the Civil Service Act. H.R. 100 and S. 399, Saving the Civil Service Act, would prevent the return of Schedule F, a statutory loophole created by the previous administration that would have bypassed the system of rules ensuring civil servants are hired and fired based on merit. The bill would also block any position in the federal competitive service, created after September 30, 2020, from being reclassified outside of merit system principles without the express consent of Congress and install a cap on the number of conversions to the frozen excepted ser-

(See *Legislative*, page 5)

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Legislative

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vice schedule (Schedule C), with the cap not to exceed more than one percent of the total number of employees, whichever is greater. And to ensure transparency, the bill would require the consent of the employee and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) before transfer to an excepted service can occur, requires OPM annual reporting, and gives Congress additional oversight.

Expand Federal Employee Paid Leave. H.R. 856 and S. 274, the Comprehensive Paid Leave for the Federal Employees Act, would expand the paid leave options for the federal workforce by broadening the list of conditions where federal employees are eligible for paid leave, including paid family and medical leave. In the United States, under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), employees are entitled to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for the birth, adoption or foster care of a child, the care of an immediate family member with a serious health condition, the inability of an employee to work because of a serious health issue or conditions caused due to an immediate family member's active-duty service in the military. In comparison, although federal employees are eligible for paid leave in connection with the birth, adoption, or foster care of a child, they are only eligible for unpaid leave for the remaining FMLA covered events.

Fair COLA for Seniors Act. The Fair COLA for Seniors Act of 2023, H.R. 716, would ensure the consumer price index used to determine annual cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) accurately measure seniors' spending. Specifically, the bill would ensure the Bureau of Labor Statistics adopts the Consumer Price Index for the Elderly (CPI-E) to measure goods and services seniors frequently purchase instead of the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W) which tracks the spending habits of the urban workforce. Under the CPI-W, seniors lose purchasing power due to underestimated inflation. They spend more on medical care and goods specific to their needs compared to the average spending of the public. In contrast, the CPI-E would only

track the spending habits of Americans aged 62 and older and can better determine appropriate cost adjustments. When measuring costs experienced by seniors with the CPI-E, inflation is greater by an estimated 0.27 percent per year than what the CPI-W shows, highlighting the need for Congress to take up this key legislation.

In addition to supporting the above legislative proposals, I urge all MONARFE CDLs, Chapter Legislative Chairs, and MONARFE members to take note of the following items.

House FSGG Subcommittee Advances Spending Bill. On June 21, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government (FSGG) marked up its FY24 appropriations bill, which determines funding levels for the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and may determine federal pay raises. The bill is now pending before the full appropriations committee. It would cut allocated funding for affected agencies by 58 percent and claw back previously allocated agency funding as a partial offset. The spending cuts would directly impact the operations of OPM Retirement Services, the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) and the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) program. Importantly, the legislation is silent on a federal employee pay raise, indicating Congress may defer the decision to the President, who suggested a 5.2 percent average pay increase in 2024.

National Defense Authorization Act 2024. The NDAA often includes provisions regarding civilian personnel matters governmentwide. On July 14, the House passed its version of the National Defense Authorization Act, H.R. 2670. The house bill included minor civilian personnel amendments regarding hiring and pay in specialized defense agencies, but not the broader pay and benefit cut provisions recommended by the House Republican Study Committee. However, controversial amendments made to the bill would rescind the Pentagon's program reimbursing servicemembers who must travel to obtain

reproductive health care, limit access to gender-affirming care for transgender troops, and end various diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives at the Defense Department. The Senate will take up its version of the NDAA, S. 2226, later in July and it is not expected to include these controversial amendments. This is likely lead to a contentious conference committee fight and an extended delay in final legislative action.


WEP Reform Legislation Reintroduced in the House. Legislation to reform the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) was reintroduced in the House of Representatives by Ranking Member of the Ways and Means Committee, Rep. Richard Neal, D-MA. The Public Servants Protection and Fairness Act, H.R. 4260, is the latest iteration of WEP reform and would grant relief to current WEP-affected individuals by providing them with an extra \$150 a month and instituting a new WEP formula for future retirees. NARFE prefers the full repeal of the WEP.

Washington Wants to Make 3 Big Changes to Social Security: Here's What Retirees Should Know.

The Social Security trust funds could be depleted by 2033, at which point benefit cuts would likely occur automatically. The Social Security Expansion Act would expand benefits by an average of \$2,400 a year per person, completely finance Social Security for the next 75 years, and eliminate a \$22.4 trillion shortfall. The House Bill is H.R. 1046 (Schakowsky) and the Senate bill is S. 393 (Sanders). Following are 3 of the most noteworthy changes proposed. (1) Apply new payroll tax of 12.4% to all income over \$250,000. (2) Add a 12.4% tax rate on new investment income of more than \$250,000 annually. (3) Increase Social Security cost-of-living adjustments (COLAS) by substituting the CPI-E (E for Elderly) for the current CPI-W). The CPI-E tends to measure inflation two-tenths of a percentage point higher than the CPI-W. The Social Security Expansion Act is considered by many to be unlikely to win approval in Congress in its current form.



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Chapter Meetings and Congressional Outreach



LINDA KURZ
District 2 CDL

MAY: Chapter 2071 met May 4 with 9 members present and Barb Sapia, President of chapter 1278, and husband as guests. We heard a very interesting presentation from Betty Halker on the history of Valley Park, MO. Betty is a lifetime resident of Valley Park and serves as an alderwomen for the city. She included her own memories of growing up there and gave each attendant a free book of the Valley Park history by Ken Curtiss. She related that the flood of 1915 decreased the city's population from 3,500 to 500 citizens. Valley Park was the playground for St. Louisans prior to statehood and in the 1800's.

I scheduled a meeting with staff of Senators Hawley and Schmitt for May 3rd at their Federal Courts bldg offices in downtown St. Louis. Craig Pettibone, Judith Smart and Laura Moore from chapter 112-Greater St. Louis, attended with me. We asked for support of HR82, the WEP/GPO appeals bill, Equal COLA for FERS retirees and other NARFE legislative priorities. They listened and promised to pass all the information we brought to the Senators in Washington, D.C.

On May 17, I arranged a similar meeting with Jordan Fears, Regional Communications Development Director for Rep. Ann Wagner. Craig Pettibone and Judith Smart joined me and we repeated our requests for support of the same legislative issues. Jordan also promised to share our request along with the issue papers with Rep. Wagner's Legislative Director in Washington.

JUNE: Chapter 2071 met on June 1 with 10 members and 2 guests. Chris and Barb Brinkman showed slides

and shared their experience from a trip to the Holy Land. We are down to 54 chapter members of whom 35 are National members.

On June 8, I joined 12 members of the Hannibal chapter at a dinner meeting. No members of the Mexico chapter attended. This was the first meeting of the informally combined chapters in 6 months. Apparently when the Mexico chapter meets it's with the same 3 remaining members. I briefed them on all the news from the Federation Board meeting in April and on significant legislative developments. Although Hannibal and Mexico chapters are still debating whether they should close, Richard Daggett agreed that he, one of his members, and his daughter and son-in-law, both active employee members, would help with local arrangements. Richard will work with Marcy Nelson and Kay Crayton in planning the 2024 Federation Conference. The Federation will need to provide all the volunteers to staff the conference itself.

JULY: Chapter 2071 celebrated our traditional FREEDOM luncheon with 24 members and guests. Our guests from chapter 112- Greater St. Louis were Craig Pettibone, President, CDL#1 and Federation Legislative Chair; Lois Nowlin, Region V and MOFed Alzheimer's Chair; Elbert Williams, Federation NARFE-PAC Chair. From Chapter 1240 we greeted Thresa Wilson, President and Pamela Williams and from Chapter 1278, Barb Sapia, President, and husband Al. We always enjoy the special menu prepared for us by chef Grant Young and the lively social exchange among those attending.

We are anticipating a new fiscal year with some tidbits and legislative concerns. If you're buoyed by reducing inflation, rising stock indices and summer activities with family and friends you might not be upset by more increases in the federal reserve interest rate beyond 5.25% and the potential 3.1% COLA which could

change of course before being actually determined in October.

The IRS is sitting on \$1.5 billion of unclaimed refunds for tax year 2019 which, if not claimed by July 17, will revert to become property of the U.S. Treasury. Will it be used to offset the budget deficit and so make the passing of a FY2024 budget more likely by the end of September?

The Senate has drafted the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) using the limits agreed to in the debt limit deal. The Senate endorsed the 5.2% pay raise for the military and federal employees that the President suggested in his budget proposal and the House, by its silence, also endorsed the federal pay raise.

However, both chambers have to draft all 12 agencies budget bills before a vote and reconciliation agreement for the FY 24 budget can happen. Republicans in the House are adamant to reduce FY24 spending to FY22 levels and they say that they don't care about shutting down the government if they don't get their way. The Republican Study Committee, with much influence, unveiled its budget plan which proposes to end automatic pay raises altogether and replaces it with targeted pay increases for merit-based performance. They also propose to end the General Schedule of pay all together. Furthermore they want cuts in benefits like less paid leave and increased employee contributions to their retirement and health insurance.

Will we end up with a continuing resolution that will automatically reduce funding by 1% across the board? Going into an election year, would the House shut down the government? All the old proposed cuts to federal employee benefits are back on the table.

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Chapter Activities



JOANNE COLLINS
District 5 CDL

The MO NARFE Board voted earlier this year to add Chapters 307,1012, 1915 and 1980 to CDL-5. I have contacted most of the newly assigned chapter's officers. Most of the chapters are having regularly scheduled meetings in area restaurants with limited attendance. They are inviting locally elected officials, first responders and insurance company representatives to be the presenters. The Blue Springs, Kansas City, and Independence chapters are maintaining their

meeting schedule and trying to keep in touch with their homebound members in order to keep them informed. In Jackson County, many property owners resisted the proposed high tax increases they received this year. The filing date was extended to July 31, 2023 because of the large number of appeals for new appraisals and on-site inspections. Remember, the "system" works when you work the "system".

I visited with Congressman Emanuel Cleaver II, MO-Fifth District, twice in June about NARFE legislative priorities and regional veterans services for the 2023-24 session. He has been very supportive and he was able to answer my questions about our infrastructure needs and the lack of local Post Office services. I thanked him

again for his 100% support for all of NARFE's legislative issues. I encourage our membership to communicate with all our federally-elected officials.

A recent NARFE magazine article gave us the website to see how many federal employees are in each state. Missouri has more than 109,000 active and retired federal employees. The US Post Office is the No.1 employer in our state. When you visit with our two US senators and eight congress members this fall season, remind them that NAFRE members are informed and our vote counts. It takes all of us to get their vote for the federal legislation that we support. We do and will advocate in-person, mail letters, send emails and make phone calls.

For the Federation Board Meeting Oct. 26, 2023

LINDA KURZ
District 2 CDL

Your Federation is trying to bring news timelier to your attention. I'm submitting this report for the printer before it is presented to the Federation Executive Board on Oct. 26, because publication dates are not in sync with our meetings.

We are facing another shutdown because our Congress is embroiled in so much infighting that they have forgotten to serve the interest of the people which requires compromise. They blame it on the "government" and its bureaucracy. They ARE the government and their laws have set up the bureaucracy. If they don't agree to a continuing resolution most of our colleagues will again work without pay and retirees are already seeing their retirement investments tumble in value.

Taxpayers all will lose significant value in their assets. Interest rates will remain high much longer as U.S. securities are downgraded in value. Although the Con-

gressional goal is to reduce spending, shutting down operations is driving costs up. Go figure!

Please help recruit new NARFE members during health fairs or other opportunities. Each new member adds power to our influence on the Hill. The Federation will add \$10 to the \$10 national recruitment bonus for each new verified member. As in the past NARFE's Fall membership drive runs to the end of the calendar year.

Chapter 2071 and Chapter 1278 meet monthly. In August about 12 members and 2 guests of Chapter 2071 listened to John Ermold, docent of the Missouri History and the Soldiers' Memorial Museum, explain the symbolism and content of the Soldiers' Memorial Museum in downtown St. Louis. One could have heard a pin drop. We discussed the FEB decision to hold next year's conference in tandem with the national NARFE FEDcon24 to be held in downtown St. Louis and developments among the Missouri Federation Executive Board staff.

Because of the paucity of Service Officers, please don't hesitate to call on Will Cooper, the MOFED Ser-

vice Officer, who will help any family to contact OPM after losing a loved one who drew a federal pension. Contact him by phone: (816)289-6485 or email: cooperwl@gmail.com.

Chapter 1278 at their August meeting were entertained by chapter member Darlene Skaggs talking about her trip through North Carolina, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. Six members attended.

In September, 13 members and 3 guests of Chapter 2071 participated in balance strengthening exercises led by Dr. Beth Templin, a Geriatric Physical Therapist with her own studio for consultation and therapy in South St. Louis. The exercises are easy to do at home and over time will strengthen leg and arm muscles to avoid or at least break a fall in a way which avoids fractures.

President Biden negotiated a debt limit and budget deal with Speaker McCarthy in August on which McCarthy reneged. A new bipartisan deal was negotiated by Congress with the White House and was called The Fis-

(See Board, page 8)

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Board

(Continued from page 7)

cal Responsibility Act of 2023. It was signed in the House Sept. 6 and in the Senate on Sept. 7. It also called for suspension of the debt ceiling through Jan. 1, 2025; kept discretionary spending flat in FY24 but carved out defense and VA budgets as submitted and capped both non-defense and defense spending at 1% growth for FY25; clawed back \$20 bil. of the \$80 bil intended for the IRS and spelled out where \$1.4 bil in rescissions were to come from. Unfortunately, this version again did not receive support since Speaker McCarthy bowed to demands of far-right House members. If McCarthy succeeds in some

way to pass a short continuing resolution, the government could be shut down at the end of the term.

Chapter 1278 heard about mastering and living with arthritis from Dr. Beth Templin during their September meeting.

October chapter meetings will happen within the next 4 weeks. Chapter 2071 will meet next week and Chapter 1278 during the last week. At Chapter 2071 Dan Fuller, historian, and volunteer coordinator of Bellefontaine Cemetery tours, will explain the message being expressed

by various designs and patterns on monuments and mausoleums of important former St. Louisans. Chapter 1278 expects to hear from a Salvation Army representative about their prison ministry.

COLA for Social Security and federal retirees is predicted to be around 3% but will not be specifically determined before the end of October. FEHB premiums are on average rising 7.7% but long-term care insurance likely in double digits. If a budget is eventually passed, it may include the President's 5.2% pay raise for federal employees or maybe negotiated to a lower level?

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LEGCon23

PATRICIA BARRETT
District 6 CDL



LegCon23. On June 20-23, MONARFE President Emerson Kretzer, MONARFE PAC Coordinator Elbert Williams, CDL for MO-3, Craig Pettibone, MO-1 and MO-6 Patricia Barrett participated in NARFE's LegCon23 virtual conference via Zoom. The conference gave us perspective on the status of pending issues in NARFE's Legislative Program for the current 118th Congress.

On the last days, we attended virtual meetings, led by MONARFE President Emerson Kretzer, with Washington Congressional staff for Missouri Representatives Ann Wagner (MO-2), Mark Alford (MO-4) and Sam Graves (MO-6). Although I was not able to attend Senator Hawley's meeting, we talked to Rep. Wagner's staffer, David Gans, Legislative Assistant. Rep. Alford's staffer was Kyle Upton, Legislative Assistant. Rep. Graves staffer was Andrew Gilstrap, Legislative Assistant. In our meetings, we briefed staff on HR 82 and S 597, the Social Security Fairness Act, which would repeal the WEP and GPO offset provisions; and HR 866, the Equal COLA Act, which would give FERS annuitants the same full COLA that CSRS annuitants receive. We asked the staff to tell their legislators that NARFE asks for their support for these bills. We also asked them to tell their legislators that NARFE asks for their support in protecting from future budget cuts retirement annuities and retiree health care that were promised in exchange for years of hard work on behalf of the country.

Thank you letters were sent to all congressional members.

Contacts – I sent an introductory letter to Blaine Luetkemeyer and Sam Graves, my assigned House representatives. I received a response from Sam Graves, but I received nothing from Luetkemeyer as of the date of this report.



Going clockwise from the top left, the participants are **Craig Pettibone**, Federation Legislative Chair (National), Chapter 112; **Emerson Kretzer**, Federation President, Chapter 307; **Janna Davis**, Legislative Correspondence for Senator Josh Hawley; and **Elbert Williams**, Federation NARFE/PAC Coordinator, Chapter 112.

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Missouri Federation Executive Board (FEB) Minutes of the Second Quarter Meeting

July 27, 2023 – Virtual via Zoom

President Emerson Kretzer called the meeting to order at 2:38 p.m. A moment of silent reflection immediately followed.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by 2nd Vice-President Laura Cowart.

Secretary Kay Crayton called the roll. All board members except Joanne Collins, Lois Nowlin, Patricia Barrett, and Mary Lamping were present. Also present was Region V Vice-President Cindy Reneé Blythe.

Linda Kurz moved that the minutes from the April FEB meeting be approved as distributed. Seconded. Carried.

Treasurer Marcy Nelson's reports were previously distributed. Laura questioned on the submitted report why there was money from Kansas. Because Marcy was not in the meeting at that time, Cindy responded that the members in the closed North Kansas City chapter lived in Kansas chose to be in a Missouri chapter. Kay, as past president of that chapter when it closed, confirmed that there were members who lived in Kansas and members, who could be contacted, were offered their preference of what chapter they'd like. When Marcy joined the meeting, she reported she filed 8 990-N forms with IRS for individual chapters. The Treasurer reports were accepted. Region V Field Vice-President Cindy Reneé Blythe's report was previously distributed. In addition to what is in her report, FEDCon 2024 will be in St. Louis, Missouri next August with Region V and the Missouri Federation hosting. Late this August 2023, there will be a joint meet-

ing of the NARFE National Executive Board (NEB) and the Federation Presidents at Old Town, Alexandria, Virginia. President Kretzer is presiding over the meeting of the Federation Presidents.

President Emerson Kretzer's report was previously distributed. He emphasized the goals of maintaining membership and supporting legislation benefiting federal retirees including WEP/GPO reform, full COLAs, and protecting earned federal benefits from being cut. The new Republican Study Committee (RSC), composed of 150 lawmakers, want to cut federal benefits. The national NARFE website has additional information. It's important to contact Congressional members to let them know that taking federal benefits away is not acceptable. President Emerson encourages each member to try to recruit at least 1 new member to NARFE as it's important to have the greatest number to make our voices heard. He emphasized that the squeaky wheel gets greased.

The Acting National Legislative Chair Craig Pettibone's report was previously distributed. He urged everyone to keep an eye on the RSC proposal. It's important to keep contacting Congressional members so they clearly hear our concerns.

2nd VP/Immediate Past President/Membership Chair/FEEA Coordinator Laura Cowart's report was previously distributed. Due to delays in the quarterly MO Federation newsletter publication, she encourages those who use computers to check out the MO Federation website, monarfe.org, to get current updates. MO Federation elections are coming up and she encourages members to run

for our offices.

Most Congressional District Leaders (CDLs) submitted a quarterly report. See the newsletter for Federation Officers' submitted reports.

1st CDL Craig Pettibone shared that he visited legislative offices. He also went to a pre-retirement seminar with the goal of trying to get back into the agencies to share information about NARFE and recruit new members.

2nd CDL Linda Kurz said she had nothing to add to her submitted report. Her concern is that following in person legislative office visits, there are no responses or follow up.

7th CDL Paul Mosbaugh shared that there was no July meeting nor activity to report. His federal contacts are not interested in NARFE.

NARFE-PAC Coordinator Elbert Williams' report was previously distributed. The current numbers in the report show that collections are up from last quarter. However, since the 1st quarter collections were so much lower, the upswing this quarter leaves the collections lower in total than last year. There have been no disbursements to Missouri legislators.

Public Relations Officer/Webmaster Michele Brown stated the latest newsletter is going onto the Monarfe.org website. Leslie McCormick, who is willing to be appointed by President Kretzer as the Public Relations Officer/Webmaster, will start working with Michele this fall

(See *Meeting*, page 11)

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Meeting

(Continued from page 10)

to start the transition. Cindy recognized Michele for the great job she has done for the website.

Service Officer Will Cooper reminded everyone that there is no cost for the Service Officer's help. An average of 1.5 people each month are being helped. Most of the time assistance is requested due to deaths and surviving spouses needing help.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1 – Delay in printing the MO NARFE Quarterly Newsletter.

a) Mary resigned as editor with the July-September issue. Although she could not attend, positive comments expressed appreciation for her contributions while serving as newsletter editor.

b) The current newsletter publication agreement contract expires October 2023. Since this is a free publica-

tion (the publisher solicits advertising and keeps the money raised from that) for the Missouri Federation, the FEB voted to renew the contract. (6 voted for and 2 against)

c) Mary's recommendation of having the Missouri Federation secretary send reports and articles to the publisher in Word format (files ending with .doc or .docx) was approved.

2 – Missouri Federation Conference 2024 - Time and Place

Suggestions were made to combine the in-person Missouri Federation conference with FEDCon 2024 scheduled for August 2024 in St. Louis, Missouri. Marcy made the formal motion to combine the MO Federation conference with the national meeting. This passed with 8 voting for and 0 against.

Missouri Federation elections need to be included in

the next newsletter. These forms also shared with Michele for the MONARFE.org website.

NEW BUSINESS

GEHA Webinar

Sandy Douglas, GEHA representative, contacted President Kretzner about the MO Federation hosting a statewide scheduled Zoom call. Questions arose about the need to reach out to other federal health care providers such as Blue Cross/Blue Shield to see if they would like the same opportunity.

Will suggested an online health fair which would benefit Missouri NARFE members.

The FEB meeting adjourned the meeting at 4:18 p.m.

Next FEB meeting: October 26, 2023 at 9:30 a.m. via Zoom.

MO Federation Treasurer's Report by Marcy Nelson

April 1 through June 30, 2023

US Bank Checking Account:

Beginning Balance: 4-1-2023	\$34,121.42
Receipts: April - June:	\$4,509.07
Disbursements: April - June:	\$399.80
Ending Balance: 7-30-2023	\$38,230.69

CD Balance: 4-1-2023	\$16,247.29
Quarterly Interest:	\$2.05
CD Balance: 7-30-2022	\$16,245.29

Total of US Bank Accounts..... \$54,480.03



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Missouri Federation NARFE-PAC Report



ELBERT WILLIAMS
NARFE PAC Coordinator


NARFE-PAC collections and disbursements made April thru June, the second of eight quarters in the 2023-24 congressional session, show that our PAC is building momentum. Most of the disbursements represent initial contact with the legislators or their leadership PACs. And almost all (48 of 54) of the meetings were by NARFE headquarters advocacy staff attending an event in DC. Only 6 disbursements were made following NARFE members attending a local event. Collections for just the second quarter, April-May-June 2023, was \$245,412 received from 4,214 contributions. This includes \$107,673 from national-only members who are not associated with a chapter, \$75 from one international member not residing in the states, and \$5,873 from other members not currently associated with a chapter. Within Region V, second quarter, \$16,987 was contributed by chapter members and another \$8,983 by national-only members. The Missouri second quarter contributions were \$3,012 from chapter members plus \$2,816 from national-only members in Missouri, totaling \$11,578. Total NARFE-PAC collections to date, quarters one and two, are \$481,598 nationwide from 9,931 contributors. Region V contributed \$48,716 with \$31,120 from chapter members and \$17,596 from national only members. In Missouri, the totals to date are \$6332 from chapter members and \$5246 from national only, totaling \$11,578. Total NARFE-PAC disbursements to date, as of June 30, 2023, are \$151,500. The disbursement for Apr thru Jun

only, quarter two of this cycle, was \$107,000, which is less than quarter one disbursements which included our annual, up-front disbursements for membership in the Senate and House, Republican and Democrat, campaign committees. But quarter two disbursement to legislators was almost three times that of the previous quarter. Disbursements this quarter included \$85,500 to 52 legislators (45 first time recipients this cycle), \$0 to party committees and PACs, and \$21,500 to nine "Leadership" PACs (all nine, first time this cycle). A leadership PAC is one set up to support one specific legislator. Within Region V, one new disbursement went to Nebraska representative

Don Bacon. Last quarter two \$1000 disbursements were made to two Minnesota congresswomen. No other legislators from Region V states have received a disbursement this cycle. 2023-24 NARFE-PAC Goals. The collection and disbursement goals are to raise \$1,600,000 and to disburse \$1,200,000 to legislators, leadership PACs, and to national political committees. Another goal is to send NARFE members to 125 local fundraisers. An ongoing goal is to increase the number of monthly sustainers – members who make automatic monthly contributions via credit card or OPM withholding.

2023-2024 SESSION OF CONGRESS	Contributions by Members		Disbursements	
	MISSOURI	REGION V	USA	USA
Qtr-1 Jan-Feb-Mar 2023	\$3,320	\$14,133	\$236,186	\$151,500
Qtr-2 Apr-May-June 2023	\$3,012	\$16,987	\$245,412	\$107,000
Chapter Mbrs Total:	\$,6332	\$31,120		
National-Only Total:	\$5,246	\$17,596		
TOTAL TO DATE:	\$11578	\$48716	\$236,186	\$151,500
2023-24 NARFE Goals:			\$1,600,000	\$1,200,000

Thank you for your regular contributions and for additional support of NARFE-PAC month in March. Missouri members' support for NARFE-PAC remains strong. You may contribute to PAC at any time, online at the narf.org website (navigate to the NARFE-PAC page and click on one of the donate options). You may also donate by mail using the form in the monthly NARFE Magazine. For assistance contact your Missouri NARFE-PAC Coordinator at elbertw@charter.net or 314-503-1232.



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Unveiling Email Scams: Protecting Yourself Online



WILLIAM COOPER
Federation Service Officer

Email scams, also known as phishing scams, are deceptive attempts to obtain personal information by posing as trusted entities. Common types of email scams include phishing, Nigerian Prince

scams, lottery or prize scams, fake inheritance scams, job offer scams, and gift card purchase scams. Recognizing red flags such as urgency, suspicious email addresses, poor grammar, requests for personal information, and unsecured websites is crucial for staying safe online. Protecting yourself involves verifying senders, being cautious with links and attachments, enabling two-factor authentication, staying informed about scam techniques, educating others, and being wary of gift card requests. Reporting scams, monitoring accounts, and seeking professional help when

needed are essential steps to take. By being vigilant and implementing security measures, you can minimize the risk of falling victim to email scams and protect yourself in the digital landscape. And use a unique password on every website. This quarter I aided three families and provided copies of the NARFE booklet "Be Prepared for Life's Events" to six Missouri Federation members. This booklet helps you record information your survivors will need. If you want a copy, just send a request to me at cooperwl@gmail.com or call 816-289-6485.

NARFE Applauds OPM's Proposed Rule to Bolster Merit-based Civil Service

NARFE News Release
September 19, 2023

Alexandria, Va. - In response to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) issuing a proposed rule titled "Upholding Civil Service Protections and Merit System Principles," NARFE National President William "Bill" Shackelford issued the following statement:

"Every administration should—and will—bring along its own cadre of political appointees to set and direct the policy of the duly elected President. But this

rule will strengthen the long-standing bipartisan consensus of a nonpartisan civil service, which safeguards the rule of law and professionalism over partisanship or nepotism, while ensuring continuity between administrations.

"This rule reflects the legislative history and intent of Congress to craft a statutorily developed, merit-based civil service system. It precludes the use of statutory loopholes, such as the previous administration's attempt to create a broad exception to merit-based civil service rules via a new excepted service schedule, Schedule F.

In so doing, the final rule would add a procedural roadblock in the way of any future administration looking to undermine merit-based protections via a return of Schedule F, or other similar efforts.

"As I applaud OPM for its proactive measures, this rule alone may only delay—and not prevent—a return of Schedule F in the future. It's up to Congress to clarify its statutory intent further, by passing legislation such as the Saving the Civil Service Act, H.R.1002/S.59, to more fully protect the non-partisanship of the civil service."

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FLTCIP Enrollees Await Another Round of Extraordinary Premium Increases

NARFE News Release
September 12, 2023

Alexandria, Va. – In response to notification that Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program enrollees will be mailed letters this week revealing another round of premium increases, NARFE National President William Shackelford issued the following statement:

“Additional premium increases for FLTCIP enrollees may be multiples higher than the amount they were originally quoted, contrary to what any reasonable person could expect when they entered into their contract for coverage. Now, they may be facing a choice between unaffordable premiums or inadequate coverage; and have lost the time and opportunity to forge an alternative plan for future long-term care costs.

“The scenario resembles a classic bait-and-switch scheme, as FLTCIP enrollees took the bait when they

purchased insurance at lower-quoted price, and now are forced to switch to a higher cost product or lose their investment.

“Worse yet, the insurer, John Hancock, will continue to earn guaranteed profits based on the premiums paid, per the contract approved by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). The quoted FLTCIP premium amounts were supposed to stay stable over the life of the enrollee. Why is the insurance company making profits after failing to get actuarial assumptions correct year after year – or earning less than expected investment returns – while enrollees pay higher premiums again and again?

“I urge Congress to not only investigate the profit structure of the agreement between John Hancock and OPM – but also authorize premium relief to enrollees, either directly or via a tax credit.”

Background

- Effective May 1, 2023, the US Office of Personnel Management (OPM) extended its contract with John Hancock to provide insurance coverage to all FLTCIP enrollees. Although OPM solicited multiple bids, John Hancock remained the sole bidder. The program administrator, Long Term Care Partners LLC, has mailed notice of this action to enrollees.

- Per the extended contract, most enrollees should expect to face a premium increase effective January 1, 2024. Each enrollee will be offered personalized options that will include accepting the premium rate increase to maintain current coverage or to reduce coverage to reduce the impact of any increase. They will have 60 days to decide. OPM indicated that premium increases would be phased in over three years for some options.

Expanded telework, a benefit now under threat, effectively boosts pay for hundreds of thousands of Feds

By Nathan Abse, GovExec., Contributing Editor (NARFE Daily News Clips)
August 30, 2023

Some workforce policy changes effectively double as significant boosts to pay and benefits, sometimes cutting your costs by more than an annual pay boost or a promotion. They're the kinds of things you'll miss if they go away.

During the pandemic the federal government suddenly switched to maximum telework status, and hundreds of thousands of feds discovered for the first time that working from home or a remote location can act like a raise. Ramped up to cover far more employees and agencies, telework spared you not only the risk of illness, but a lot of wasted time and a long list of expenses you used to pour into the morning commute.

In a nutshell, the percentage of all feds who telework

drifted slowly up from 14% in 2012 to 22% in 2019. In 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic raging and the Office of Personnel Management's call for agency flexibilities on remote work in place, according to an OPM report, 45% of feds were teleworking.

But how many of those of you who suddenly teleworked ever took the trouble to tally your savings? The

(See *Telework*, page 15)

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Telework

(Continued from page 14)

research and telework consultancy Global Workplace Analytics has done just that, in a very detailed way. Two years ago, during the worst of COVID-19, the group calculated the average telecommute could save an average employee a high of \$6,000 a year. And recently, the group's president, in an interview with Government Executive, reiterated that working from home still pinches far more than pennies.

"The average American can save between \$2,500 and \$6,000 a year if they telework half of the time—the average for those who do so," Kate Lister, who helms GWA, said. "That includes the net [savings] of increased energy costs at home. In all, the money saved is comprised of a combination of transportation costs, parking, food, and work clothes."

"In addition, half-time telecommuters save the equivalent of 10 workdays a year in commute time," she added. "Government employees give back about 40% of that time. In other words, they spend 40% of the time they would have otherwise spent commuting doing work." GWA, in multiple analyses over the last few years, points out that the savings to employers is even more significant: an average of \$11,000 per year for each half-time remote worker.

A Government Accountability Office report documented that some agencies made small-scale use of remote work efficiencies as far back as the 1950s. Federal telework as we know it—in wider use and under formal statutes and policies—didn't really start on a sustained course until the 1990s.

Studies over the decades since show teleworking employees often report productivity and performance gains, while employers mark greater employee engagement, recruiting and retention—and that expanded remote work and hybrid work also correlates with improvements in "work culture," as spotlighted in recent Gallup and O.C. Tanner studies showing double-digit jumps in engagement accompanying the shift.

Despite a mountain of research available from GWA, federal government and other reputable sources generally showing good results from increased telework, a bipartisan backlash and push for a return to physical agency workplace has gained momentum.

How is the backlash taking shape? Republicans in Congress led the charge during the pandemic and have doubled down this year with the introduction of the proposed SHOWUP Act (H.R. 139). And starting in April of this year the Democratic administration began piling on with its own back-to-the-office initiative.

Why are Republicans pushing for a drastic reduction in telework? SHOWUP backers highlight what they say is a need to restore adequate agency services. "As the public health emergency officially ends in the United States, so should the pandemic-era telework policies for federal bureaucrats," Sen. Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., a sponsor of the Senate's version of the bill, has said. The rationale given for the Democratic administration's push to slash telework reads very similarly—it's just leavened on the back end. "The guidance ... directs agencies to refresh their work environment plans and policies—with

the general expectation that agency headquarters will continue to substantially increase in-person presence in the office ... "And then, workplace flexibilities will continue to be an important tool for ensuring agencies are able to retain and compete for top talent in the marketplace."

Regardless of how the current remote work controversies sort themselves out, Lister has a prediction. "I predict about half of the federal workforce will be 'Work from Home'—WFH—or nearer to home 5 years from now," she told Government Executive. "The average frequency will be about half-time; a number that has held steady for the last decade."

Lister is also concerned about another major factor driving pro-"return to office" forces: Embarrassing publicity around just how much federal office space is unoccupied and unused, and a resulting unthinking reaction in some circles to just fill it up again.

"Telework didn't cause the federal office space bloat," Lister told Government Executive. "It merely helped reveal it—a problem the government has had for at least five years."

"While [the growth of telework] will hurt a lot of businesses in the short run, small business has proven to be highly resilient," she added. "Basing the decision about whether or not people can work from home around [making use of] excess federal real estate is ludicrous. With thinking like that leading us, we would all still be riding horses. The world moves on."

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You are the last generation who spent childhood without television; instead, you "imagined" what you heard on the radio.

With no TV, you spent your childhood "playing outside".

There was no Little League.

There was no city playground for kids.

The lack of television in your early years meant that you had little real understanding of what the world was like. We got "black-and-white" TV in the late 40s that had 3 stations and no remote.

Telephones were one to a house, often shared (party lines), and hung on the wall in the kitchen (no cares about privacy).

Computers were called calculators; they were hand-cranked.

Typewriters were driven by pounding fingers, throwing the carriage, and changing the ribbon.

"INTERNET" and "GOOGLE" were words that did not exist.

Newspapers and magazines were written for adults and the news was broadcast on your radio in the evening. (your dad would give you the comic pages when he read the news)

New highways would bring jobs and mobility. Most highways were 2 lanes (no interstates).

You went downtown to shop.

You walked to school.

The radio network expanded from 3 stations to thousands.

Your parents were suddenly free from the confines of the depression and the war, and they threw themselves into working hard to make a living for their families.

You weren't neglected, but you weren't today's all-consuming family focus.

They were glad you played by yourselves.

They were busy discovering the postwar world.

You entered a world of overflowing plenty and opportunity; a world where you were welcomed, enjoyed yourselves.

You felt secure in your future, although the depression and poverty were deeply remembered.

Polio was still acrippler. Everyone knew someone who had it.

You came of age in the '50s and '60s.

You are the last generation to experience an interlude when there were no threats to our homeland.

World War II was over, and the cold war, terrorism, global warming, and perpetual economic insecurity had yet to haunt life.

Only your generation can remember a time after WWII when our world was secure and full of bright promise and plenty.

You grew up at the best possible time, a time when the world was getting better.

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Group Challenging Vaccine Mandate Presses High Court to Proceed with Case; WH Wants it Dismissed

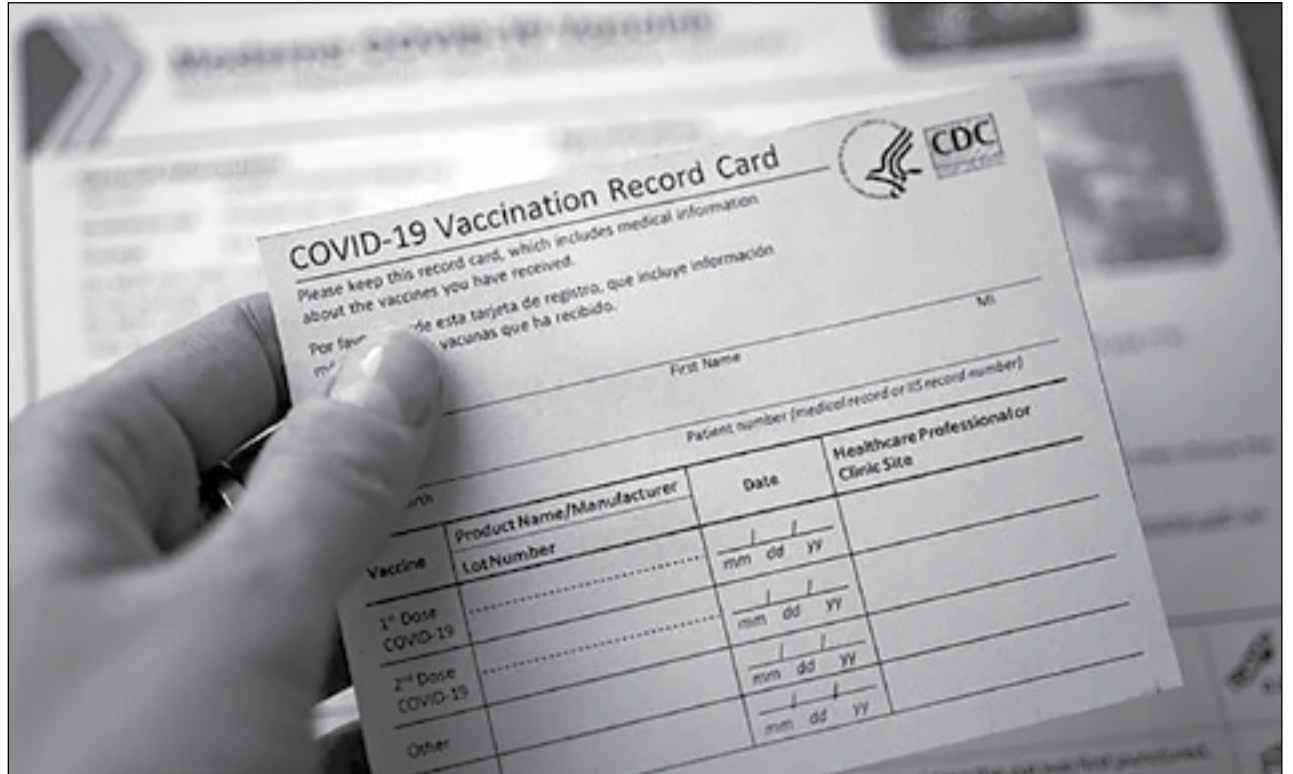
FEDweek, (NARFE Daily News Clips)
August 29, 2023

The group that brought a so-far successful challenge to the Biden administration's Coronavirus vaccination mandate for federal employees has asked the U.S. Supreme Court to allow the case to continue even though the White House has revoked that directive.

The Feds for Medical Freedom group said that in recently asking the high court to dismiss the case, the Justice Department was seeking to "litigate to the hilt in both district and circuit court and—only if they lose—then decline to seek substantive review from this court and instead moot the case and ask this court to erase the circuit court loss from the books."

The suit resulted in a federal district court issuing a preliminary injunction against the mandate in early 2022, just as agencies were to begin enforcing it, holding that the group had shown that it was likely to succeed in its claim that the mandate exceeded a President's authority over the federal workforce. A series of challenges followed, focusing instead on whether the Civil Service Reform Act required that the case be brought first through the MSPB channels rather than directly into federal court. In March of this year a divided full Fifth Circuit federal appeals court ruled that a direct challenge in federal courts was allowable and sent the case back to the trial judge for a full consideration of the merits of the complaint. Action there has been held up, though, pending a possible challenge before the Supreme Court. The Justice Department made such a challenge last month, arguing that there is no longer a controversy, since the mandate was revoked in the meantime.

In their response, Feds for Medical Freedom argued that "there is value in keeping the Fifth Circuit's decision on the books. It was issued after extensive deliberation by seventeen circuit judges. And the opinion serves as a critical warning against government overreach during times of emergency. The Court should decline Petitioners' [the Justice Department's] request to send this entire



Feds for Medical Freedom accuses the WH of trying to get SCOTUS to "erase the circuit court loss from the books."

Image: Evgenia Parajanian/Shutterstock.com

episode down the memory hole."

Eleven of those judges, it added "the court also held that the President had exceeded his authority by mandating that millions of civilian employees be subjected to a medical procedure."

As with most of the arguments in the case, the filing dealt mostly with technical issues of court jurisdiction—asserting that the administration should not be allowed to avoid review of the underlying issues by revoking the mandate after it lost at the circuit court.

"Beginning in Fall 2022 and continuing into early

2023, Petitioners dismantled other parts of their COVID-19 response regime yet conspicuously declined to withdraw the mandate for employees. Petitioners were waiting to see whether they would prevail below, and only after receiving a sharp rebuke from the en banc Fifth Circuit did they decide to withdraw the employee mandate, forgo seeking further merits review, and instead try to get the Fifth Circuit's precedential decision vacated," it said.

It said the administration was seeking an outcome of "heads we win, tails you get vacated."

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After a Summer Break, Congress Has a lot on its Plate this Fall

By Drew Frieman, Reporter FED News Network (NARFE Daily News Clips)
September 7, 2023

After the summer break, Congress has a lengthy, hefty to-do list this fall. And without getting a couple of key items across the finish line, there will be some serious implications for federal employees.

The House and Senate Appropriations committees are far from an agreement on agency spending levels for fiscal 2024. The Senate has advanced all 12 of its appropriations bills out of committee with bipartisan support and plans to move at least three spending bills to a floor vote next week. But the spending package is hitting a wall in the House.

That means top of the list for Congress right now, not surprisingly, is to pass some sort of temporary stop-gap bill by Sept. 30 to avoid a government shutdown.

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) are in ongoing discussions over a continuing resolution, a common temporary measure used to avoid a shutdown. But it's a steep hill to climb.

"A lot of the fight is really about the numbers," Marc Goldwein, senior vice president and senior policy director for the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, said in an interview. "There's a large share of members of the House that want to spend well below what the Fiscal Responsibility Act topline level is and there are others that aren't willing or able to agree to those levels."

The House's Freedom Caucus, a smaller group of conservative lawmakers, is calling on McCarthy to make major spending cuts for the government's 2024 budget.

"The question is, are they going to continue to push on this so hard that they create a crisis for Speaker McCarthy and the functioning of the House?" John Hatton, staff vice president of policy and programs at the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association (NARFE), said in an interview. "At the end of the day, there's certainly a possibility of a shutdown."

The debt limit agreement, enacted in June, also included one unique provision. If a continuing resolution is still in place on Jan. 1, 2024, agencies would see a 1% cut for both defense and non-defense spending take effect in April. That's in direct contrast to the 3% boost to defense spending included in June's debt limit agreement. The

goal is to incentivize Congress to take up appropriations and avoid a long-term CR as well as a shutdown.

During government shutdowns, hundreds of thousands of federal employees are furloughed, meaning they aren't allowed to work and don't receive paychecks. Under a 2019 law, they are guaranteed eventual back pay, but shutdowns still have massive consequences.

"In past shutdowns, almost half of the 2.1 million Americans who work for the federal government were furloughed," Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-Va.) said Thursday on social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter. "These federal employees will not receive back pay until the shutdown is over. Federal contractors, on the other hand, may never receive any back pay at all."

Now, two lawmakers are trying to end government shutdowns once and for all. Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Va.) and Rep. Don Beyer (D-Va.) reintroduced the bicameral End Shutdowns Act Wednesday. The bill would automatically kick in a continuing resolution on Oct. 1 if Congress can't reach an agreement on appropriations. The Senate would also be barred from taking up legislation unrelated to government funding.

"Government shutdowns have disastrous consequences for federal employees and government contractors and slow down critical government services," Kaine said in a press statement Wednesday. "This is unacceptable, which is why I'm reintroducing my bill to prevent government shutdowns."

But appropriations packages are far from the only priority for Congress this fall — and many other to-do items have direct impacts for federal employees.

Repealing Social Security's "evil twins"

One bill in Congress is continuing a now decades-long push from bipartisan lawmakers to change part of the 1935 Social Security Act.

The Social Security Fairness Act, which Reps. Garrett Graves (R-La.) and Abigail Spanberger (D-Va.), and Sens. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) and Susan Collins (R-Maine), introduced in both chambers in January, would revoke two longstanding provisions impacting retirement savings of some federal retirees.

The Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) reduces or eliminates Social Security benefits for federal employees and other public sector workers who receive an annu-

ity from their time in government, but who also worked in a Social Security-covered job. Similarly, the Government Pension Offset (GPO) reduces or eliminates Social Security benefits of the spouses, widows or widowers of those with government pensions.

Last Congress, the Social Security Fairness Act gained broad bipartisan support, with 305 cosponsors in the House and 42 in the Senate. This year's version of the legislation so far has 289 cosponsors in the House and 45 in the Senate.

With just one more cosponsor in the House, lawmakers would meet the 290-cosponsor threshold to file a motion to put the bill on the House consensus calendar. That could effectively force the Ways and Means Committee to take up the bill and advance it or alternatively force a floor vote, but it remains up in the air.

"Graves has indicated that he wants to try to work with the committee to try to find a path forward for relief, rather than file that motion right away. And he would have some time to do so and still be able to force some action," Hatton said. "That's probably a more realistic scenario — a compromise bill — given where the committees have been on this."

NARFE has been a major advocate of a full repeal of WEP and GPO, saying the pair of provisions unfairly punishes public servants through reduced Social Security benefits.

Other introduced bills that would similarly change WEP and GPO include the Public Servants Protection and Fairness Act, which would provide some relief to feds from WEP, but not fully repeal it. The Social Security 2100 Act would fully repeal both WEP and GPO. Most recently, the introduction of the Equal Treatment of Public Servants Act made another attempt to reduce the effects of WEP by changing the provision's funding formula.

Bills aiming to limit the Thrift Savings Plan

Lawmakers have also made several attempts to limit investments in the Thrift Savings Plan, a trend that has become increasingly common in the past couple of years. One policy rider in the House Appropriations committee's 2024 Financial Services and General Government bill aims to block funds from going toward any TSP mutual fund options that are based primarily on environmental, social or governance (ESG) criteria.

(See *Congress*, page 20)

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Congress

(Continued from page 18)

The committee folded language similar to the “No ESG in the TSP Act,” first introduced in May, into the larger appropriations bill.

If enacted, the bill would most likely end the TSP’s new mutual fund window, the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board has said.

On the Senate side, there is an additional push to block TSP investments from going to China with a bill that Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) reintroduced earlier this year. The legislation would likely shut down the TSP’s I Fund, if enacted, according to NARFE’s Hatton.

“We’re certainly sympathetic to limiting investments where there are connections to the Chinese national security establishment or human rights abuses,” Hatton said. “But there are better ways to do it without shutting off TSP investors from all the I Fund securities and without singling out the TSP.”

Rubio proposed the bill as an amendment to the 2024 National Defense Authorization Act, but it ultimately received 55 votes, falling short of the 60-vote threshold to include it as an amendment.

Although these bills are not likely to be enacted this year, Hatton said he’s concerned about recent growing attempts to politicize the TSP. The trend means similar legislation will likely arise in years to come and possibly gain traction over time.

Continued push for answers on federal telework

House Republicans made their position on telework clear earlier this year by passing the SHOW UP Act along party lines. The bill aims to return federal workers to pre-pandemic office arrangements, meaning a much larger

return-to-office than the Biden administration’s current plans.

But with less traction for the companion bill in the Senate, leaders on the Oversight and Accountability Committee are changing their strategy. The lawmakers pushed the White House for answers on the reasoning behind increasing telework for feds. They have also called on individual agencies for more data on exactly how many employees telework and teleworking’s effects on productivity.

The Biden administration is pushing an at least partial return-to-office starting this fall. Many agencies have announced changes to in-office requirements for their employees beginning as soon as this month. In some cases, federal employees will have to more than double their time spent in the office.

Anti-Schedule F legislation up in the air

Despite its revocation in January 2021, the Schedule F executive order from the Trump administration continues to get attention both in Congress and from unions and other federal employee organizations.

The executive order, if implemented, would have made about 50,000 civilian career feds in policy-related positions at-will workers and therefore easier to fire.

Earlier this year, Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Va.) and Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-Va.) reintroduced the Saving the Civil Service Act in an attempt to prevent future presidential administrations from implementing another Schedule F-type policy.

Along with Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), Kaine submitted the bill as an amendment to the Senate’s ver-

sion of the 2024 NDAA to include language prohibiting a potential return of Schedule F. But the amendment did not gain enough votes to become part of the larger legislation.

The bill so far has limited bipartisan support. Reps. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-Pa.) and Don Bacon (R-Neb.) are the only Republican cosponsors on either of the companion bills.

And some Republicans are pushing in the opposite direction. For one, Sen. Rick Scott (R-Fla.) and Rep. Chip Roy (R-Texas) reintroduced a bill earlier this year that would abolish the Merit Systems Protection Board, an agency that ensures merit system protections for federal employees.

Odds of a 5.2% federal pay raise

There’s still time for Congress to enact a different pay raise scheme for civilian federal employees on the General Schedule for 2024.

But with both the House and Senate’s spending packages so far silent on the federal pay raise, it’s unlikely for Congress to deviate from the Biden administration’s plans for a 5.2% average raise for most GS feds starting in January.

President Joe Biden submitted his alternative pay plan to congressional leaders on Aug. 31.

If Congress doesn’t act, Biden would then sign off on an executive order by Dec. 31 to make the pay raise official. If enacted, it would be the largest pay raise for feds since 1980. But it still falls short of the approximately 24% wage gap between the public and private sectors.

(See *Congress*, page 22)



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Congress

(Continued from page 20)

Other bills to watch over the long term

Although not garnering as much widespread attention, several other bills pending in Congress signal deeper reforms for the federal workforce.

For one, the largely bipartisan Chance to Compete Act would codify several modern recruitment practices for agencies, including the use of subject matter experts, shared certificates, skills-based hiring and technical assessments.

Additionally, the Improving Government Efficiency and Workforce Development Through Federal Executive Boards (FEBs) Act would authorize FEBs and establish a stable source of funding to support them. FEBs coordinate local emergency response activities and build

agency partnerships with state and local partners to help implement federal programs.

And the Government-wide Executive Councils Administration and Performance Improvement Act would authorize the Office of Executive Councils (OEC), housed in the General Services Administration, to assist with government-wide policy-making councils such as the Chief Acquisition Officers Council, the Chief Human Capital Officers Council and the Performance Improvement Council. The OEC would sunset six years after the bill's enactment.

Still, with appropriations legislation top of mind, it's possible that many of these bills won't make it to the finish line unless tacked onto the spending omnibuses or the

NDAAs. But many organizations including the Professional Managers Association and the Senior Executives Association are continuing to advocate for these reforms.

"It is already clear any legislation that can be framed as an accountability push will be used for messaging during this election and may see movement in the House," Natalia Castro, deputy director of government and public affairs at Shaw Bransford & Roth, a law firm representing various federal employee organizations, said in an email to Federal News Network. "Therefore, we are focusing on bipartisan reforms that can enhance accountability without undermining the merit system, such as Chance to Compete, and pushing for those."

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2. I don't suffer from insanity; I enjoy every minute of it.
3. Some people are alive only because it's illegal to kill them.
4. I used to have a handle on life, but it broke.
5. Don't take life too seriously; No one gets out alive.
6. You're just jealous because the voices only talk to me
7. Beauty is in the eye of the beer holder.
8. Earth is the insane asylum for the universe.
9. I'm not a complete idiot -- Some parts are just missing.
10. Out of my mind. Back in five minutes.
11. NyQuil, the stuffy, sneezy, why-the-heck-is-the-room-spinning medicine.

12. God must love stupid people; He made so many.
13. The gene pool could use a little chlorine.
14. Consciousness: That annoying time between naps.
15. Ever stop to think, and forget to start again?
16. Being 'over the hill' is much better than being under it!
17. Wrinkled Was Not One of the Things I Wanted to Be When I Grew up.
18. Procrastinate Now!
19. I Have a Degree in Liberal Arts; Do You Want Fries With That?
20. A hangover is the wrath of grapes.
21. A journey of a thousand miles begins with a cash advance.
22. Stupidity is not a handicap. Park elsewhere!

23. They call it PMS because Mad Cow Disease was already taken.
24. He who dies with the most toys is nonetheless DEAD..
25. A picture is worth a thousand words, but it uses up three thousand times the memory.
26. Ham and eggs... A day's work for a chicken, a lifetime commitment for a pig. (how true)
27. The trouble with life is there's no background music.
28. The original point and click interface was a Smith & Wesson.
29. I smile because I don't know what the heck is going on.

Appreciate every single thing you have, especially your friends!
Life is too short, and friends are too few!



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10 Ways to Love Your Brain!

Many NARFE chapters have programs on Alzheimer's Awareness. We learn what to look for in recognizing the disease, how to cope as a caregiver, and what services are available to help the family members who have a loved one with the disease.

Show your brain some love! Your brain is the command center of your body — and just like your heart, lungs and other critical organs, it deserves to be a priority when it comes to your health. The Alzheimer's Association recommends these 10 tips to help reduce your risk of cognitive decline.

1

**Break a sweat.**

Engage in regular cardiovascular exercise that elevates your heart rate and increases blood flow to the brain and body. Several studies have found an association between physical activity and reduced risk of cognitive decline.

2

**Hit the books.**

Formal education in any stage of life will help reduce your risk of cognitive decline and dementia. For example, take a class at a local college, community center or online.

3

**Butt out.**

Evidence shows that smoking increases risk of cognitive decline. Quitting smoking can reduce that risk to levels comparable to those who have not smoked.

4

**Follow your heart.**

Evidence shows that risk factors for cardiovascular disease and stroke — obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes — negatively impact your cognitive health. Take care of your heart, and your brain just might follow.

5

**Heads up!**

Brain injury can raise your risk of cognitive decline and dementia. Wear a seat belt, use a helmet when playing contact sports or riding a bike, and take steps to prevent falls.

6

**Fuel up right.**

Eat a healthy and balanced diet that is higher in vegetables and fruit to help reduce the risk of cognitive decline. Although research on diet and cognitive function is limited, certain diets, including Mediterranean and Mediterranean-DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension), may contribute to risk reduction.

7

**Catch some Zzz's.**

Not getting enough sleep due to conditions like insomnia or sleep apnea may result in problems with memory and thinking.

8

**Take care of your mental health.**

Some studies link a history of depression with increased risk of cognitive decline, so seek medical treatment if you have symptoms of depression, anxiety or other mental health concerns. Also, try to manage stress.

9

**Buddy up.**

Staying socially engaged may support brain health. Pursue social activities that are meaningful to you. Find ways to be part of your local community — if you love animals, consider volunteering at a local shelter. If you enjoy singing, join a local choir or help at an afterschool program. Or, just share activities with friends and family.

10

**Stump yourself.**

Challenge and activate your mind. Build a piece of furniture. Complete a jigsaw puzzle. Do something artistic. Play games, such as bridge, that make you think strategically. Challenging your mind may have short and long-term benefits for your brain.

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Chapter Meeting Information

Chapter 11, Springfield. Meets 2nd Wednesday, 10:30 am, at Jimmy's Egg, Parkcrest Shopping Center, 3837 S. Campbell Ave., Springfield, MO (202) 253-6350

Chapter 19, Joplin. Meets 2nd Tuesday, 11:30 am at Granny Shaffer's Restaurant, 2728 N. Range Line (except July). (417) 642-5688.

Chapter 20, Greater Kansas City, MO. Meets 1st Saturday monthly (2nd Saturday in July & Sept), 1 pm at Metro Police Station Community Room, 7601 Prospect. (816) 761-0301.

Chapter 112, Greater St. Louis. Meets 2nd Tuesday monthly at 11 am (except July & December). Sunny Street Café, 11692 Manchester Rd, Des Peres, MO. (314) 698-2890.

Chapter 307, St. Joseph. Meets 4th Saturday every other month (January, March, May, July, September, November) at noon at Perkins, 3901 Frederick Ave, Saint Joseph, MO.

Chapter 683, Hannibal. Meets 2nd Thursday, 11:30 am at various locations. (573) 735-4713.

Chapter 694, Poplar Bluff. Meets 2nd Wednesday, 12 Noon at Twin Towers. (573) 785-0296.

Chapter 695, West Plains. Meets the 4th Tuesday (except December), 12 Noon at Los Amigos Mexican Restaurant, 1449 Preacher Roe Blvd., West Plains. (417) 938-4312.

Chapter 1012, Cass County. Meets 1st Friday, 11:00 am at Foxwood Springs in Raymore, MO (even months). (816) 322-6230.

Chapter 1164, Independence. Meets 3rd Thursday, 12:30 pm at St. Pauls' Lutheran Church. (816) 478-0172.

Chapter 1240, N. St. Louis Co./Florissant. Meets 3rd Tuesday, 12 Noon at Harmony United Methodist Church, (except July & December). (314) 741-8088.

Chapter 1278, Jefferson County. Meets 4th Tuesday, 12 Noon for lunch, 1pm for program, at Wesley Rogers in Arnold, at the corner of Jeffco and Richardson. (636) 938-9905.

Chapter 1463, Golden Valley, Clinton. Meets on the 2nd Wednesday at 12 Noon at the Clinton Senior Center. (660) 351-2790.

Chapter 1843, Missouri State Chapter. Meets on line and via telephone at 11:00 am on the 3rd Monday of May, September, and December, and in person at the annual Federation Conference in April. (573) 372-8101.

Chapter 1859, Mexico. Meets 4th Tuesday, 11:30 am January, March, May, July, September and November at Paris Senior Center, Paris, MO. (573) 672-3202.

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Chapter 1915, N. Central. Meets second Monday at 12 noon at Murray's Buffet and Grille, 719 South Washington St, Chillicothe. January, March, May, July, September & November. (660) 255-4655.

Chapter 1944, Northland, Excelsior Springs. Meets 2nd Saturday, Please call (816) 309-6553 for information and location.

Chapter 1980, Pomme De Terre. Meets 1st Wednesday, 11:30 Lunch, 12 Noon for meeting, at Smith Restaurant, Collins. (417) 998-9320.

Chapter 2041, Blue Springs. Meets 2nd Tuesday, 11:30 am, at Sandy's Restaurant 1255 SW US, MO-7, Blue Springs, MO (816) 295-1325.

Chapter 2071, West St. Louis County. Meets 1st Thursday, 11:00 am at Young's Ice Cream Parlor and Grill, Valley Park, MO. (636) 629-3987.

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