

## NARFE Nevada Federation Convention 2017 Minutes; May 17 & 18; Las Vegas NV

The NARFE Nevada Federation Convention for 2017 was held in Las Vegas, Nevada, on 17 and 18 May 2017. The convention venue was the Palms Hotel and Casino near the Strip in central Las Vegas. There were approximately 40 attendees, including some from the California Federation. Issues discussed included legislative and personnel matters, including the approval of new Federation Bylaws and the election and installation of new Federation officers. Ms. Verena Briley Hudson, the Federation Executive Vice President, published the convention agenda (attached).

The first day of the convention, Wednesday, 17 May, began with a sidebar meeting of Federation officials, in which Mr. Bill Dwyer, the current Federation President, presided. Ms. Helen Zajak, the Executive Vice President for NARFE Region VIII, was also present. Mr. Dwyer addressed membership issues, in particular the lack of volunteers to fill federation and chapter officer positions. Ms. Donna Neese, the Federation Treasurer, reported on the overall financial condition of the federation. Mr. Dwyer emphasized that the changes to the present Federation Bylaws are significant. In particular, the chapters no longer have delegate voting responsibility. There is a wide geographic distribution of Federation chapter members in Nevada. The new bylaws call for a Legislative Chairman to be a member of the Federation Executive Board.

The issue of fiduciary responsibility for chapter funds was discussed, since there have been problems. For example, approximately \$2,000 was lost when the Mesquite Chapter closed. There was also an issue involving unauthorized turnover of funds to Alzheimer's after closure of a chapter. For chapter bank accounts, there should be a minimum of two persons authorized to sign on any chapter account. There has been at least one instance in which the only person with signature authority disappeared and the account, and chapter funds, were "frozen". The Federation President and/or Executive Vice President must approve all expenses.

Volunteers are still needed to serve as officers for the Federation and for chapters. Members seem to avoid joining chapters, partially because of chapter dues, and also because of having responsibility placed on them immediately after joining chapters as new members. There are issues with newsletter mailings, such as financing and out-of-state mailings. There are also membership tracking and recruiting issues that should be addressed.

Mr. Dwyer formally opened the convention with the announcement that, due to all NARFE members being voting members, this will be the last Federation Convention (as such). He then introduced Ms. Helen Zajak as the acting convention parliamentarian, and others. Mr. Gill Renneckar (Chapter 2031) served as Sargent at Arms. The Alzheimer's Service Officer, Ms. Sharon Brunson, was available to accept donations. There were a number of administrative remarks.

Mr. Dwyer led the group in a Moment of Silence and the Pledge of Allegiance. He then followed with a discussion of the new Federation Bylaws draft. He stated that the primary missions of NARFE are Legislation and Service. He said that chapter meetings are currently loaded with

extraneous activity and noted that chapter service and legislative officers generally had nothing to say at meetings. The new Bylaws are written to better reflect the NARFE Mission. He stated that Federation and chapter members can only be residents of the State of Nevada. Affiliated members pay dues only. The Federation Newsletter is costly to distribute and involves much work. The Federation now distributes just over 400 newsletters by mail each month. National members are NARFE members who are not members of a chapter. We regard it as important to continue publishing the newsletter. Officers are to be elected and there will no longer be convention delegates for voting. The President has the authority to change the duties of officers. The President and Executive Vice President approve expenditures and the Treasurer has authority to sign checks. The Federation will continue to have annual meetings, as called for in the National Bylaws, and Federation President and Treasurer Reports are required. NARFE will hold a Federation President conference in Jacksonville Florida in July. Even though there will no longer be a convention, there must be at least an annual meeting.

The Federation National Legislative Officer is to be a member of the Executive Board. NARFE needs more interaction and communication with legislators and their staffers, especially since Congress is targeting federal employee and retiree entitlements. Public events provide opportunities for interaction with legislators, however, visits to the legislator offices are best.

The new Bylaws draft was unanimously carried after a motion (J. Mork, Chapter 423), and seconding (Mr. Raneri, Pahrump Chapter). Mr. Dwyer predicted (somewhat humorously) that, in view of congressional benefit cut proposals, the “best recruiters” in the future for NARFE will be House Majority Leader M. McConnell and House Speaker P. Ryan.

NARFE is the only federal advocacy organization (not AARP). Each NARFE member has one Congressman and two Senators. Federal retirees need to stick together and join NARFE. Chapters tend to lose prospective members because of “duty dumping”.

Mr. Dwyer stated his view that the NARFE Magazine should be “redone” to give it more general appeal and recognition. Government agencies are now cutting back on retirement seminars. NARFE needs to recruit, but does not know how. On-line advertising may be a possibility. A Facebook page is available, but a user account is needed to access it to create user groups. One recommendation is to get NARFE onto the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) site.

Jerry Mork stated that there were two Federal Employee Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) representatives present: Ms. Kathy Reardon of Blue Cross/Blue Shield, and Ms. Stacy Steer from Health Plan of Nevada. The convention planning committee had arranged for tables to be set up at the rear of the convention room to enable attendees to meet with them regarding their health needs. Jerry Mork thanked the two representatives for attending the convention.

The Nevada Chapter Presidents then delivered their respective reports (attached):

1. Reno #0142 – Ms. Kathryn Vitalie
2. Las Vegas #423 – Ms. Jane Vaughn Meisel {still need report copy . . .}
3. Henderson #2031 – Ms. Harriet Huber (for Ms. Vikki Rennekar)

4. Min-Gard #2167 – Ms. Ellie Erskine (for Mr. Don Babb)
5. Pahrump #2276 – Ms. Pam Raneri
6. Hawthorne #1854 - not represented

The President of Region VIII, Ms. Helen Zajak, reported that she had attended the Legislative Training Conference in Alexandria VA in March of last year. Candidates for Executive Director were interviewed and narrowed to two top candidates. Ms. Barb Sido, who seems very dedicated, was selected. There are problems with “800” numbers and emails. She participated in the Hawaii Federation Convention and traveled on to Reno. Represent National President and Secretary/Treasurer same for all federations. In general, NARFE must change to be able to meet future challenges. There are problems in membership renewal and chapter dues are deterring potential members from joining chapters. There is a need to stress what it is that chapters can offer for membership. There is a Strategic Planning Team (Jerry Hall, San Francisco Chapter) and the team needs membership input ([stratplan@narfe.org](mailto:stratplan@narfe.org)). There is to be a possible Federation Concept revision. On the positive side, there has been a general slowing of membership decline in NARFE.

Different NARFE initiatives were discussed, which include: distribution of calendars; \$1M in net donations, and the Federal Benefits Institute (Ms. Tammy Flannigan) with its webinars. NARFE is doing much, but more is needed. NARFE is trying to get information to the press and TV. The NARFE Political Action Committee (PAC) contributes dollars to legislators who support NARFE-friendly positions. Legislative staffers contribute heavily to the decisions of Congressional legislators.

There is a potential of 39,000 NARFE members in Nevada. However, the Privacy Act presents a hindrance to identifying possible prospective members. Letters to the editor can be effective and community service impact is significant. National members can contribute. There are about 214,000 members nationally of which only about 23,000 are active. There are about 5 million persons (active and retired federal employees) who are eligible to join NARFE. Outreach is needed to get national members to become chapter members. The average age of NARFE members is now 76 years and the drop in renewals is about 2/3 higher than drops due to death. The California Federation has introduced a pilot program to demonstrate the value of chapters (e.g. publication of newsletters and promotion of retiree welfare). Ongoing engagement is needed in the area of Legislation. First impressions with legislators and/or their staff members are important. Manual F-10, Chapter and Federation Officer Manual, is available on the NARFE Website. It provides information on chapter operations, formation of committees, and records management.

The Hawaii Federation has a new President, Ms. Joyce Matsuo, who is working the issue of locality pay to augment Hawaii and Alaska retiree pension annuities. The question of service officer responsibility was raised. Service officers should only give the pros and cons of options to their clients so as not to be held legally liable. Mr. Dwyer felt that NARFE should be getting public recognition for monetary contributions to local legislators. There is a new National Executive Director position, which was recently filled, at NARFE HQ. There was also a question

about how much executives are paid, however this is a Privacy Act matter. NARFE remains a non-partisan organization. (For example, before the last national election, NARFE made numerous attempts to contact the Republicans for input to NARFE Magazine, though with no result.)

On the second day of the convention, Thursday, 18 May, Mr. Jerry Mork opened the meeting with administrative remarks. He introduced the newly reelected City Councilman Mr. Stavros Anthony, of Ward #4, Las Vegas, who then delivered welcoming remarks. He emphasized that it is important to remain active after retirement.

Mr. Robert Ruskamp, the acting Federation Secretary for the convention, gave a brief summary of his attendance at the Legislative Training Conference held in Alexandria VA in mid-March 2017. While there, he was able to visit with legislative staffers of all four representatives and both senators of Nevada. He then introduced Ms. Jessica Klement, the Director of the HQ Legislative Department.

Ms. Klement then made a presentation to update the group on the status of NARFE legislative efforts in Washington DC. She emphasized that federal retirees had already made substantial contributions to debt reduction in recent years, amounting to about \$120 billion due to lack of cost of living allowances (COLAs), furloughs, and a shutdown. The Chairman of Budget has proposed \$318B in cuts, including retiree benefits, for FY18. NARFE has been able to prevent losses in benefits for almost the last seven years.

Administration plans for government reform imply reductions to the federal workforce and in benefits for retirees. NARFE is in a defensive posture and just maintaining present benefits and preventing losses over the next few years will amount to victory.

The new administration is about to release its new budget proposal for FY18, which looks unfavorable to federal retirees. For example, it is recommended that there be no future COLAs. The Postal Reform Bill (HR756) is under consideration, which would force US Postal retirees to enroll in Medicare Part B, or forfeit their coverage under FEHBP. NARFE has proposed that there be a short "opt out" period provision for Medicare Part B. A NARFE legislative priority is to maintain the FEHBP and oppose forced Medicare enrollment. The administration is now concerned with health care and tax reform. There is also an effort to put more flexibility into the TSP, specifically to improve withdrawal options.

There is a need for grassroots involvement and NARFE members should remember that congressional legislators are supposed to represent their interests. There is a NARFE Legislative Action Center (LAC) now available on the NARFE Website. The site offers pre-written letters to legislators on issues, which can be edited and personalized. A Legislative "hot line" number (866-220-0044) connects to the legislative offices and is best for providing input for imminent actions or legislative votes. The NARFE Magazine contains useful information, however the articles are generally about two months behind current status. Congress has annual recesses that last about 4 to 5 weeks during which it might be possible to contact legislators or their

staffs locally. Chapters can invite legislators, or their staff members, to attend monthly chapter meetings. Regarding legislation, the general rule is: Silence equals Acceptance (!).

NARFE in the news publicity has increased with an increasing number of hits on the Website and NARFE continues to build relationships with the press. The NARFE Political Action Committee (PAC) is the political arm of NARFE and depends totally on member voluntary contributions. The PAC awards funds to legislators who support legislation friendly to federal retirees. The PAC is strictly non-partisan and only contributes to Congressional legislators, not to the Presidential campaign.

NARFE has a sustainer contributor program (minimum of \$10/month), which is the backbone of the PAC since it enables planning. Goals for this year are to raise \$1.5M, with \$1M for distribution to political. NARFE wants to send members to 100 political fundraisers and increase sustainment contributions by 50%. NARFE has support and working relationships with members of both national political parties, Republican and Democrat. Information about contributions is available on the Website (need to log in). There is also a federal benefits department available at NARFE HQ to answer questions about benefits and entitlements.

Mr. Mork then introduced the visiting representatives from the Nevada congressional offices. Representatives included: Mr. Andrew Lingenfelter for Senator Dean Heller, Ms. Lianne Costello for Congresswoman Jacky Rosen (District 3), Ms. Susan Carlson for Congresswoman Dina Titus (District 1), and Ms. Mariella Hernandez for Congressman Reuben Kihuen (District 4). Each of the staffers gave a brief talk on their positions with respect to pending legislation concerning federal retirees. All showed general consideration for the needs of federal retirees.

Vikki Renneckar (President, Chapter 2031, Henderson NV) then presided over a secular memorial service to in honor of members who had passed away since the last convention.

Ms. Barbara Leetch, the Region 8 Alzheimer's Coordinator, presented an award to Sharon Brunson (Chapter 2031) for her work in promoting contributions to Alzheimer's research. Attendees contributed about \$900 during this convention. Alzheimer's is the sixth leading cause of death in the US (more than breast and prostate cancer combined). Although the disease is not curable so far, the symptoms can be delayed through diet, exercise, and stimulated mental activity. Contributing to Alzheimer's research remains a high priority for NARFE.

The convention then continued to the nomination and election of Federation officers. Three candidates for three positions were nominated, seconded, and elected by acclamation. These were: for President: Mr. Robert Ruskamp; for Secretary: Ms. Jane Vaughn Meisel; and for Treasurer: Ms. Donna Neese (continuing in office). There were no nominees for the offices of Executive Vice President (to replace Ms. Verena Briley Hudson), or for a National Legislative Chairman.

Bill Dwyer, as the out-going President, gave remarks. He expressed his appreciation for the support that he had received during his tenure. He emphasized the need to concentrate on the

NARFE mission, since pension annuities are the life blood of members. The Strategic Planning Committee can offer a possible new plan of action, but the situation remains serious.

He then gave advice on how members should approach influencing representatives in Congress. Members should contact their representatives in writing and point out how the situation affects them personally and emphasize the need for them to earn your vote. Visits to congressional offices are the most effective approach. Letters should be directed to the local congressional office as opposed to the DC office. In general, independent visits by single individuals are more effective than group visits.

In closing, Ms. Zajac presented the Distinguished Service Award to Mr. Dwyer in recognition of his many years of service. The convention was then formally adjourned.

Later in the afternoon the convention was concluded with a formal banquet. During the banquet, Mr. Bill Dwyer, as acting Federation President, awarded certificates of appreciation to the following individuals:

- Jane Vaughn Meisel: for working the merger of the Las Vegas and East Las Vegas chapters into the new Las Vegas Chapter #423, and also for preparing badges and “goody” bags for the convention.
- Paula Perez for her work as the new Federation Services Officer, and for her help in preparing the “goody” bags for the convention.
- Heidi Fanning for her work as the Federation Newsletter editor.
- Kathryn Vitalie for her work in the arrangements for the National Convention in Reno in 2016.
- Sharon Brunson for her work in the Alzheimer’s support at the convention, including procurement of raffle gifts and managing contributions.
- Vikki Rennekar for arranging entertainment at the convention banquet (in which she participated), and for presiding at the convention memorial ceremony.
- Gene and Lee Abat, and Nellie Erskine, for performing the annual Federation Audit.
- Jerry Mork for stepping up to assume the role of Lake Mead District Vice President (after Tom Nicholson had to resign due to health reasons), and for his work in organizing and chairing the Nevada 2017 Federation Convention.
- Donna Neese for her dedication and long hours as Federation Secretary.
- Verena Briley Hudson for her great work in making arrangements for the 2017 Federation Convention at the Palms Hotel and Casino.

Finally, Ms. Zajac, in her capacity as Region VIII Vice President, formally installed the three newly elected Federation officers (President, Secretary, and Treasurer).

Prepared by: Mr. Robert Ruskamp  
NARFE Nevada Federation Secretary (Acting)  
Secretary, Chapter 2031, Henderson NV

Date: 22 June 2017