

National Active & Retired Federal Employees Association

President's Message

By Pat Meyers

Greetings Chapter 7 Members! I hope you all are enjoying the lovely spring (sometimes summer) weather.

The 2023 VFN Conference in Hampton, VA is over. It was a productive event with 85 members and guests present, including NARFE National President, Bill Shackelford and Region X Vice-President, Robert Allen. We were welcomed to the city of Hampton on Monday by its mayor, Donnie Tuck and then settled down to business, including a Region X report, election of state officers, workshops and Area Caucus Meetings. In between sessions, we visited exhibits and bid on silent auction items for the Alzheimer Association. Officers elected for the upcoming year included: 1st Vice-President, Larry McIlwee, and 2nd Vice President, Patricia Wolfe, both of whom were elected by acclamation since they were unopposed. Since the offices of President and Secretary each have two candidates, election for those offices will be by ballot sent either by mail or electronically to all Virginia members. There were no nominees for the office of treasurer so the current incumbent will remain in place. Ted Pasek, our current Area X Vice-President was re-elected in our Area X caucus meeting. State Alzheimer's chair, Donna Shackelford reported that at conference time Virginia was in 1st place for donations to Alzheimer's research, something we should be proud of!

Tuesday's session began with a lovely memorial service for deceased members. Mark Arpa from the Vienna-Oakton chapter provided music and was the soloist at the service. Our chapter had 17 members memorialized. Tuesday meetings included a key presentation by NARFE President, Bill Shackelford. He emphasized the importance of grassroots efforts and the NARFE PAC in advocacy efforts. Key priorities include: protecting earned income & health benefits, WEP/GPO reform, more accurate COLAs for FERS retirees, OPM customer services, relief from long term care insurance premiums and prescription drug savings for FEHB.

Membership recruitment/strategy is also a top priority since membership has declined drastically since the mid-1980's. He mentioned talk of changing NARFE from a 501(c)(4) organization to perhaps (c)(3) or (c) (6) for more flexibility. NARFE HQ is understaffed, including the Federal Benefits Institute and HQ is working hard to recruit, but competing with corporate entities with higher salaries is difficult. Staff are currently working at HQ 3 days a week and 2 days at home. The HQ building is still unsold since the buyer invoked a contingency clause in view of the financial market. President Shackelford also suggested we get on board with FED HUB which will be a great resource for NARFE communication nationwide. We also saw an excellent video presentation by an Alzheimer's Association researcher. On Tuesday afternoon, I attended a very good workshop on Membership led by 2nd VP Frances Boatman. The silent auction garnered about \$1000 for Alzheimer's research and our chapter 7 with its auction items contributed \$245 to the total. Many thanks to Mileva Hartman and Esther Roll for their donations. On another note, thanks to Dan Perch and Dr. Miguela Gutierrez for volunteering to serve on the chapter 7 audit committee.

Plan to join us on June 7th to hear more from President Shackelford re the challenges facing NARFE. Also, I hope to see you at our May 10th meeting at Lubber Run CC.

Representatives of Compassion and Choices have been invited to our May meeting at Lubber Run Community Center at 12:30 pm. They bring attention to those who face prolonged terminal illness. Their advocacy is that which courts and legislative bodies should compassionately recognize adult's autonomy, where the sufferer maintains, through medical aid, control and dignity in the timing, manner and method of life's end. Our guests will outline the history and their future action in Virginia.

Federal Benefits in Play Yet Again as the Hill's Debt Fight Heats Up

In case you missed this story on NARFE's website, the Republican Study Committee (a caucus of conservative members in the Republican Party) recently released its "Debt Limit Playbook," which includes a number of proposals to reduce Civil Service benefits:

- calculating the retirement annuity based on highest 5 years (vs. 3, under current law);
- reducing the rate of return on the TSP's G Fund;
- eliminating the FERS annuity supplement;
- reducing or eliminating COLAs for both FERS and CSRS annuitants; and
- "voucherizing" the Government's share of FEHBP premium payments.

Scary stuff, huh? But to keep things in proper perspective, some or all of the above proposals have been kicking around Capitol Hill since at least 2010, when they were part of the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility's "Moment of Truth" report (authored by Sen. Alan Simpson and Erskine Bowles), and they have periodically surfaced over the years during budget fights. While NARFE and its allies have managed to keep these proposals from becoming law, it is also the case that most Congress(wo)men and Senators do not have a high concentration of Civil Servants in their district or state. Consequently, when budgetary trade-offs (aka, "pay-fors") are needed, reducing Civil Service benefits are often seen as the first, rather than last resort. Thus, remain vigilant for "Legislative Alerts" from NARFE as the current fight progresses, and take action if/when needed.

Government Accountability Office Report on Improper Payments (GAO-23-106285, 3/29/23)

Were its findings not so disturbing, one might be tempted to chuckle at the irony in the release of a report detailing large-scale over-payments by the Federal Government at the very moment that Congress is locked in combat over budgetary and debt/deficit issues. As stated in this report, since FY2003, cumulative estimates of improper payments for programs and activities have totaled approximately \$2.4 trillion, including \$247 billion for FY2022. Even worse, GAO found that the Federal Government, "...is unable to determine the full extent to which improper payments occur or to reasonably assure that appropriate actions are taken to reduce them."

For FY2022, five highly popular programs (Medicaid, Medicare, unemployment insurance, the Paycheck Protection Program, and the Earned Income Tax Credit) accounted for roughly 75 percent of improper payments. Should Congress need "pay-fors" in any upcoming budget agreement, plugging these gaping holes would be a good place to start, rather than hitting up Civil Service benefits---a point you should raise in letters to your Congress(wo)man and to Senators Kaine and Warner.

Use of a *Supported Decision-Making Agreement (SDMA)* In Lieu of Formal Guardianship

At our March Chapter meeting, Denise McDonald, with Arlington County's Department of Human Services gave us an overview of the legal concept of *guardianship* and its uses in Virginia. In addition, she briefly mentioned the availability of a number of less-restrictive alternatives to guardianship, one of which is the SDMA. More recently, Sen. Bob Casey (D-PA) chaired a hearing on the Hill ("Guardianship and Alternatives: Protection and Empowerment") to support his recently-introduced *Guardianship Accountability Act (S.1148)*. The premise of this bill is that guardianships, as currently structured and practiced, can unduly constrain the rights of the "protected," and in some cases lead to abuse by the "protector" --- hence the need for alternative mechanisms.

Enter the SDMA, which, unlike guardianship, provides for a *mutual agreement* between an individual who needs support and another person who agrees to provide such support. While SDMAs are recognized in Virginia law (*Virginia Code 37.2-314.3*) exclusively for adults with an intellectual or developmental disability, they may be used to cover other situations as well---with the caveat that third parties (e.g., banks) would not be required to honor their terms. Notarization of these agreements is desirable, but not legally required.

For more information on SDMAs, contact Sara Thompson at the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (Sara.Thompson@dbhds.Virginia.gov) . To view the State-approved form for an SDMA, go to: dbhds.virginia.gov, and look for "supported decision-making" under the tab, "Getting Help."

June 7 Luncheon – NARFE National President, Bill Shackelford, Keynote Speaker

Please join us for fellowship and good food at our annual June luncheon as we welcome NARFE President, Bill Shackelford as our keynote speaker. We will also have our usual raffle for the Alzheimer Association's research projects. The event will be held on Wednesday, June 7, 2023, at the Italian Cafe, 7161 Lee Highway (S. Washington St.), Falls Church, VA. Social hour and cash bar are scheduled for 11:30 a.m. with lunch to follow at 12:00 p.m. The price of the luncheon is \$27.00 and will include salad, choice of entree, bread, non-alcoholic beverage and choice of dessert. Reservations must be received by **June 1, 2023**. Please select from the following entrees:

1. Poached Salmon: Poached with garlic, lemon, herbs and chardonnay wine, served with roasted potatoes & vegetables;
2. Pasta Primavera: Penne pasta served with portobello mushrooms, shiitake mushrooms, sun-dried tomatoes, and asparagus in a chardonnay wine sauce; (**gluten-free penne pasta available upon request**)
3. Chicken Piccata: Boneless chicken breast sauteed in butter, capers, artichokes and lemon juice, served with linguini & vegetables; (**gluten-free penne pasta available upon request**)
4. Spaghetti with meat sauce or marinara sauce. Please specify choice of sauce.

Dessert: Choice of Spumoni Ice Cream or Tiramisu

To make reservations, please complete the form below and send, along with your check, payable to "NARFE Chapter 7" to Pat Meyers, 5912 1st Street S., Arlington, VA 22204. Call Pat at 703-578-3372 if you have questions or special dietary needs/restrictions.

NARFE Chapter 7 June 7, 2023 Luncheon Reservation

Please **CIRCLE** your choice of entree and dessert.

Name: _____

Entree: 1. Salmon 2. Pasta Primavera 3. Chicken 4. Spaghetti; Meat or Marinara Sauce

Dessert: 1. Spumoni Ice Cream 2. Tiramisu

Name: _____

Entree: 1. Salmon 2. Pasta Primavera 3. Chicken 4. Spaghetti: Meat or Marinara Sauce

Dessert: 1. Spumoni Ice Cream 2. Tiramisu

Please send your check for \$27.00 for each luncheon to Pat Meyers, 5912 1st Street S., Arlington, VA 22204. Reservations must be received by June 1, 2023.

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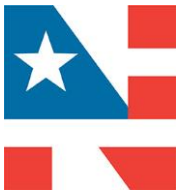
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