

February 2025



FEDERAL BENEFITS EXPERTS

Chapter email:
narfe356@hotmail.com

MANASSAS CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

NARFE Chapter 356, Manassas, VA - Organized September 9, 1953

Next Meeting Date

February 19

*Logan's Roadhouse
7731 Donegan Drive
Manassas, VA*

**Lunch
11:30 AM**

**Program
12:30 PM**

Logan's is located in the Bull Run Shopping Center by the pond near Sudley Road.

INCLEMENT WEATHER

In case of inclement weather, we will follow the plans for Prince William County schools.

- ♦ If schools are closed, the meeting will be canceled.
- ♦ If schools are opening late, we will hold our meeting.

Future Meetings:

Chapter luncheon meetings are held on the third Wednesday of the month. We meet bimonthly on the even numbered months.

Our Executive Committee will continue meeting virtually on the first Tuesday of each month.

March 4--Executive Committee

April 1--Executive Committee

April 16--Chapter Luncheon

Transitional Healthcare as We Age, Jeff Alexander, healthcare services director

Mr. Alexander will present about healthcare services and needs as we age. There are so many services available to the community it is sometimes difficult to know what to access and when. Jeff will help to explain the various roles each service plays and factors to consider when making decisions related to healthcare and aging. He will also discuss the essential healthcare documents we all should have.

For more than 25 years, Jeffrey Alexander has been helping others access healthcare, dedicating the last fifteen years to assisting seniors with services, including the role hospice plays in end-of-life care and how and when to access it. While born and raised in Manassas Virginia, Jeff and his wife Anna now reside in Naples, FL where he was recruited to be the Director of Business Development for Avow Hospice in 2019.

which would strip civil service protections from a number of federal workers. Not to be outdone, the Republican-controlled Congress is planning to advance legislation, upon expiration of the current continuing resolution on March 14, focused on border and immigration spending, cutting taxes and potentially other priorities; they intend to offset the costs of funding those priorities in part through cuts to earned federal benefits. Most concerning to federal retirees would be to reduce or eliminate annual cost-of-living increases, reduce the rate of return on the TSP G Fund, limit the government contribution towards health benefits, or even eliminate the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program altogether. (See the Legislative Update on p. 2-4).

From The Chapter President

Who was it that said "We live in interesting times?" Well, at present for the federal community, I would say at a minimum that we live in disconcerting times. Upon his inauguration on January 20, President Trump has taken the following actions that impact our federal community: imposed a hiring freeze; abolished most tele and remote work; converted all Senior Executive Service positions to at-will employees, who serve at the pleasure of the President; fired as many as 18 Inspectors General; eliminated all programs, offices and positions that address equal employment opportunity; and reimposed Schedule F,

Realizing that we are in the cross-hairs, NARFE has moved quickly and created a mechanism to provide a summary of emerging threats, where they are coming from, and what you can do about it. I encourage you to check out the new link on the NARFE website (www.narfe.org) entitled "**Emerging Threats to Federal Employees.**" I would recommend that you stay informed and consult this resource often and remember that you can use NARFE'S Legislative Action Center (also found on their website) to contact your legislators. We will do our best to keep you current on newly introduced legislation impacting our pay and benefits in the Legislative Update section of this Newsletter. I urge

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you to remain an active member of NARFE, to encourage federal workers and retirees you may know or have worked with to become NARFE members and to support NARFE-PAC's efforts to provide funding to fed-friendly Congresspersons. Remember, NARFE is the only organization that actively advocates for legislation beneficial to federal civilian employees and annuitants and opposes legislation that is detrimental to our interests.

I look forward to seeing you at our luncheon meeting on February 19 at Logan's Roadhouse at 11:30.

Mary M. Brandt
President

SPECIAL CHAPTER MEMBER INVITATION

The Vienna/Oakton Chapter of NARFE will meet on **Tuesday, February 11**, at 1:00 p.m. at the Vienna Community Center. Gaston Gianni, Virginia Federation of NARFE's Legislation Chair, will speak about the issues that NARFE will focus on with the new Congress. He will also discuss implementation of the Social Security Fairness Act, which repealed the WEP and GPO. Chapter 356 members are invited to attend. If interested, please e-mail Kathy Arpa at mkarpa@hotmail.com to register. The community center is located at 120 Cherry Street, a few blocks off Maple Ave. (Rt. 123) in Vienna, VA.

Legislation Update and News of Note

Proposals for FY 2026 Federal Worker Pay Raise and Standardizing Retiree COLAs

On January 16, Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-VA) and Sen. Brian Schatz (D-HI) introduced the [Federal Adjustment of Income Rates Act](#), that calls for a 4.3% average pay raise for federal workers for FY 2026, split between a 3.3% across-the-board increase in basic pay and a 1% average boost to locality pay. Connolly also announced that he has reintroduced legislation aimed at standardizing the annual cost-of-living adjustments for federal retirees' defined benefit annuity payments. The [Equal COLA Act](#) would stipulate that enrollees in both the Civil Service Retirement System and the Federal Employees Retirement System receive the same cost-of-living increase, correcting what federal employee groups argue unfairly deflate retirees' incomes, particularly during periods of high inflation.

Source; Government Executive, January 16, 2025

Reimposing Schedule F

One of the many Executive Orders President Donald Trump issued on January 20 reinstated Schedule F, albeit under a slightly different moniker-- [Schedule Policy/Career](#). Like the first iteration of the policy, unveiled in October 2020, but never implemented, it aims to reclassify tens of thousands of federal workers in so-called "policy-related" positions out of the competitive service, stripping them of their civil service protections and making them effectively at-will employees. There are some changes from the original Schedule F executive order in that it strips much of the language regarding exempting Schedule F positions from the competitive hiring process and in various places it moves the final decision-making authority for conversion of jobs into the new job classification to the president, rather than the Office of Personnel Management director, likely in an effort to make it easier to ward off legal challenges. The National Treasury Employees Union has already filed a lawsuit seeking to block the Trump administration from moving forward with implementing Schedule F, arguing that when Congress passed the 1978 Civil Service Reform Act, it defined "policy-related" positions specifically as political appointees, not career workers, and that excepted service job schedules should be "narrowly defined." Another Executive Order enti-

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tled Reforming the Federal Hiring Process and Restoring Merit to Government Service replaces the original Schedule F's hiring process changes and tasks officials with developing a hiring action plan to reduce the time it takes to hire new federal employees, better communicate with job applicants throughout the process and better incorporate technology into the hiring and selection process. The Executive Order also calls for ensuring federal jobseekers "faithfully serve the executive branch," in addition to the existing oath to defend the Constitution. In response, Representative Gerry Connolly (D-VA) and Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA) have reintroduced the Saving the Civil Service Act, H.R. 492/S. 134, to block the implementation of Schedule F.

The Trump Administration has subsequently moved to bypass the regulatory process to rescind Biden-era rules that were aimed at barring Schedule F's revival. On January 27, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) issued guidance to agency heads on how to implement Schedule F setting up a 90-day deadline for initial agency filings. According to OPM, the president has the constitutional authority to unilaterally rescind regulations governing federal personnel issues and, therefore, does not need to adhere to the traditional rulemaking process. As such, agencies may immediately begin the work of compiling lists of "policy-related" jobs, and OPM has set an initial deadline of April 20 for agencies to submit initial petitions to reclassify workers outside of the competitive service. The guidance also indicated that a second executive order will be published later this spring to "effectuate the transfers."

Source: Government Executive, January 21 and 27, 2025; NARFE NewsLine, January 22, 2025

Administration Efforts to Trim Federal Work Force

On January 28, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) offered all 2.3 million federal employees an option to resign by February 6 and retain their current pay and benefits until September 30. Although federal regulations cap buyouts through the Voluntary Separation Incentive Payment program at \$25,000, the administration appears to be circumventing this by instructing agencies to place resigning employees on paid administrative leave for the remainder of the fiscal year. The offer warns that a "majority" of agencies will see reductions in force, and "the reclassification to at-will status for a substantial number" of fed-

eral workers. Exemptions exist for immigration and national security jobs, alongside other exclusions laid out by agency leaders. Federal unions, other federal employee associations and several Democratic Senators, including Sens. Tim Kaine (D-VA) and Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), have questioned the legal authority to offer deferred resignations and, noting that the effort appeared to be spearheaded by Elson Musk, head of the non-governmental "Department of Government Efficiency", are warning employees not to take the "deal". Employees should note that the government is funded only through March 14 and consistent with the Anti-Deficiency Act cannot commit to funding beyond that expiration date. According to the American Federation of Government Employees there is nothing in the proposal that would preclude the termination or separation of an employee who accepts deferred resignation as the documentation does not shield workers from layoffs or other adverse actions prior to September 30. Sen. Patty Murray, (D-WA), the top Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee, said federal workers could face consequences if the offers are rescinded. "We have not been able to see any authority for that, nor do we have the appropriations to do that," Murray said. "I think it could leave the employees in a tough spot." Several Republican lawmakers, on the other hand, came out in support of "government down-sizing." NARFE President William Shackelford issued the following statement: "The administration's encouragement of massive resignations across the federal government shows a blinding disregard for the rule of law in this country, which cannot be upheld without individuals to enforce it; for government services to Americans, which cannot be fulfilled without individuals to provide them; and for the basic safety of the American people, which is threatened if no one is available to respond to emergencies, prevent crimes or terrorist attacks, or ensure safe food, water and air. If too many people accept this offensive offer, I worry deeply for this country. . . ."

Source: Government Executive, January 28 and 29, 2025; www.narfe.org

Congressional Plan to Cut Federal Pay, Retirement and Health Care Benefits

Upon expiration of the current continuing resolution on March 14, Republican lawmakers have crafted a wide-ranging budget reconciliation bill to lock in and potentially expand President Trump's 2017 tax cuts and fund expanded immigration enforcement. The bill would not

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be subject to the Senate's 60-vote filibuster threshold and includes proposals compiled by GOP members of the House Budget Committee that would impact federal workers' and annuitants' retirement and health care benefits. The amount Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) enrollees would pay toward their defined-benefit annuity would be standardized at 4.4% for all workers. Currently, FERS participants contribute 0.8% of their basic pay to their retirement if they were hired in 2012 or prior, 3.1% if they were hired in 2013, and 4.4% if they were hired in 2014 or later. The FERS supplement for employees who retire before reaching Social Security eligibility at age 62 would be eliminated and retirees' annuity would be based on the average of the highest five-years of an employee's salary. Newly hired federal workers would have to choose between better retirement benefits and the civil service protections that most federal employees currently enjoy, requiring future federal employees to elect between two classification systems: the current system with merit-based civil service protections or a new at-will classification. If an employee elects to be classified as an at-will classification, they will maintain a lower FERS annuity contribution rate (4.4% or lower). However, for employees that elect to be classified under the current merit-based civil service system, their annuity employee contribution would be increased to a higher rate. The House GOP proposes replacing the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program and the new Postal Service Health Benefits program, with a "voucher model." Also included is a proposal to begin charging a fee for federal workers seeking to appeal an adverse personnel action to the Merit Systems Protection Board.

Source: Government Executive, January 24, 2025

Delay in Implementing the WEP and GPO Repeal

The Social Security Administration (SSA) has indicated that it could take more than a year to implement the Social Security Fairness Act, which repealed the windfall elimination provision (WEP) and government pension offset (GPO), retroactive to January 2024. Although President Biden signed the legislation into law in January, SSA was not provided any extra money to help effectuate the changes. The WEP affects more than 2 million retired public servants, while 750,000 spouses and survivors are affected by the GPO, with many beneficiaries seeing the entire benefit eclipsed by the offset. The SSA warned that with its current funding levels, it could take the agency at least a year

to adjust the benefits of everyone due an increase, as well as provide lump sum payments covering what they would have received in 2024 absent the provisions. The agency is currently experiencing a 50-year staffing low, while operating under a continuing resolution and had already severely restricted hiring prior to the hiring freeze imposed on most agencies by the Trump administration. SSA's analysis shows that much of the work must be done manually, on an individual case-by-case basis. SSA expects that it could take more than one year to adjust benefits and pay all retroactive benefits.

Source: Government Executive, January 29, 2025

Letter from NARFE's National President— Excerpt from the January 29 Washington Post Editorial Page

"On Jan. 20, the world watched as our newly inaugurated president signed 26 executive orders in front of thousands of his supporters in Capital One Arena. With the swipe of a pen, Donald Trump put tens of thousands of government jobs at risk and set a dark and dangerous tone for what's to come for federal employees — and the American citizens who depend on them — over the next four years. . . .

With Trump's actions, we stand to lose decades of institutional expertise and gut regulatory agencies that are critical to protecting how we live and work. Further, these actions go against the patriotism of our government employees who are driven to serve the entire country, not just one administration. In fact, half of NARFE members cite service to their country as a top reason for working in the federal government, according to a recent survey. NARFE remains steadfast in its commitment to safeguarding civil service protections and advocating for all federal employees. These threats are no longer just campaign rhetoric. As the Trump administration begins to roll out its plans, we urge political leaders to stop treating federal employees like political chess pieces. Their jobs should not be put on the line for the sake of efficiency."

William Shackelford, Alexandria

Alzheimer's Corner

Marilyn Markman, RN

I'm writing about something different this month. February is Heart Month, so it seemed fitting to write about Atrial Fibrillation, aka AFib. Have you heard about it? Do you have it or does someone you know have it?

As of September 11, 2024, a report from the University of California San Francisco reported that 10.5 million Americans have AFib. So, what is it?

Let's start with a short anatomy lesson. The heart – our favorite pump – has 4 chambers - 2 upper chambers called atriums and 2 lower chambers called ventricles. Electrical signals cause the heart to beat. So how does this work? The signal starts in the atrium which squeezes or contracts. The signal then travels to the ventricles. The ventricles' job is to pump the blood to your lungs and body. Each ventricle contraction is a heartbeat. Pretty remarkable- right?!

In AFib something happens in the atrium. Instead of contracting it quivers, making it contract very fast. This makes it too weak to send blood to the ventricles. Meanwhile, the ventricles are contracting fast, trying to keep up with the atrium. This ineffective beating causes blood to pool. Pooling blood can create clots which could travel to the brain causing a stroke. While this is all going on, how does the person experiencing this feel? The symptoms can vary – heart is racing, chest discomfort, feeling dizzy, feeling faint, tired, weak, feeling off.

What are the risk factors?

Age over 65, high blood pressure, diabetes, sleep apnea, heart disease, congestive heart disease (CHF), coronary heart disease (CAD), previous heart attack, smoking, excessive alcohol intake, inactivity, stress.

How is AFib diagnosed?

Physical exam, EKG (electrocardiogram), echocardiogram- image of heart, chest x-ray, blood tests, Holter monitor -worn for 30 days to see heart ac-

tivity, Zio patch – a disposable patch worn for 14 days to monitor the heart.

Treatment for AFib

Medications- blood thinners, beta blockers (to slow heart), channel blockers (to slow heart rate and strengthen the muscle).

Surgery - ablation- freeze sections of heart, electrical cardioversion- use electric shock to reset heart.

Pacemaker- implanted to keep heart in steady rhythm.

The newest treatment, Pulse Field Ablation (PFA) uses electrical fields to target and remove heart tissue that causes irregular heartbeat. PFA is a minimally invasive procedure that is faster and safer than traditional ablation techniques.

What can you do? Avoid triggers - caffeine, spicy food, stress, dehydration and lack of sleep. Try to keep a healthy weight, eat a balanced diet and exercise regularly. What should you not do? Smoke, drink excessive amounts of alcohol, exercise too much or too hard.

This is a lot of information about a condition that affects many people. If you have any of these symptoms, please see a doctor to get treated.

As the number of Alzheimer's patients climb, help support the researchers by contributing to NARFE so one day we will have a list of treatments like AFib has.

You can help to support our chapter's Alzheimer's fund-raising goal with your donations. Checks should be written out to "NARFE Alzheimer's Research" and in memo write "NARFE Chapter 356". Send checks to:

NARFE Chapter 356
8818 Cather Ave.
Manassas, VA 20110-6104

Your checks will be forwarded to the Alzheimer's Association through NARFE. You will receive confirmation from us as well as the Alzheimer's Association.

NARFE WEBINARS

Upcoming NARFE Webinars:

Advocacy Priorities Amid Emerging Threats and Historic Success

Thursday, February 13, 2025, 2 p.m. ET

Hear the latest regarding NARFE’s advocacy priorities from John Hatton, NARFE’s Staff Vice President for Policy and Programs. John will review the progress achieved on NARFE’s advocacy priorities over the last couple of years, and preview what NARFE’s priorities will be as a new Congress and new Administration are sworn in. Learn about emerging threats to the federal community arising from legislative threats and executive actions, and how NARFE – and its citizen-advocate members – will push back and fight against wrong-headed policies.

[REGISTER HERE](#)

Recent NARFE Webinars:

Stay or Go: Considering the “Deferred Resignation” Offer, Retirement Options, and Potential Options

Monday, February 3, 2025

Following several executive orders potentially eliminating civil service protections, stated plans to enact widespread reductions in force, and the recently e-mailed “deferred resignation” offer, federal employees must weigh whether to try to stick it out with the federal government, accept the offer, and/or consider and time their retirement, if eligible. NARFE federal benefit expert Tammy Flanagan will walk you through what you need to consider when making decisions regarding your career and future.

Know Your Rights and Obligations Following Trump Executive Orders

Federal employment law expert, and former General Counsel of the Merit Systems Protection Board, James Eisenmann, with Alden Law Group, PLLC, overviewed the legal implications of these latest executive orders. (Recorded January 30, 2025)

[Click here](#) to find links to dozens of valuable, expert-led presentations that you can watch on demand, anytime, anywhere. And remember, this is just one of many exclusive NARFE resources available to help you get the most out of your federal benefits, and one of the many reasons it pays to be a NARFE member.

Chapter Membership Report

Membership increased by 4 in January but no details are yet available from NARFE to explain the changes.

Chapter 356 membership as of January 31 is 125 members.

Email Address Changes

Notify NARFE or our chapter whenever you change your email address to continue to receive this newsletter.

CHAPTER 356 OFFICERS AND COMMITTEES

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Manassas Chapter Newsletter Online

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