

***Iowa Convention Report
West Des Moines, IA
March 26-27, 2010***

Friday, March 26, 2010

Committee meetings were held at 10:30am to 12:00 pm.
Past President's luncheon held in Fountains' Lounge, WDM Marriott.

1:00 pm: Cindy Mensen, IASCOE President welcomed everyone.

FedMen, Scott Morrison: This organization can analyze your benefits and help you to get the most out of your benefits. What is important to you? If an issue is important, you need to "do something".

Top 5 Federal Employee Questions:

- *Am I getting as much as I should?* You need to maximize your retirement.
- *Is it too late to start planning now?* Even if you are within 5 years of retirement, it is not too late.
- *Is my TSP invested properly?* This is a very detailed issue, and must be discussed individually.
- *Will I have enough to retire?* Will all of my combined savings be enough to live on.
- *How do I know what I don't know?* Many people don't know how or want to ask this question.

Sources of retirement Income

- *Creditable Service:* non deduction service, re-deposit service, prior military or unused sick leave If you worked prior to 1-1-89 for FERS, you will only be credited if you make a deposit.
- *Social Security,* this was not intended to be your sole source of income. Predictions are that "as of 2041, the SS Trud Fund will be exhausted and there be enough money to pay only about 78 cents for each dollar of the scheduled benefits" per SS published document. You must be aware of Windall Elimination Penalty, Spousal Offset and Catch 62 Penalty (for military time).
- *TSP,* this is a very detailed topic and your level of savings directly affects your benefits Other Savings You need at least 40% of your retirement in TSP and savings

Items to consider

- How many years could you be retired and will you have enough in your retirement to carry you through financially. You need at least 6 distinct portfolios for every 5 year segment in retirement.
- Survivor Benefits- must be elected and affects survivor's ability to maintain health insurance. If you cut out the survivor benefit, you lock your spouse out of health insurance. It is very important to understand how the survivor benefit will affect you and your spouse into retirement
- Where do you go to get help? OPM serves over 2 million people and will tell you to consult a financial professional. Many financial planners do not have expertise with federal benefits. Be careful of the advice that you get.

What FEDMEN can do? : They will consolidate your retirement information and calculate what will work best for you. You can have individual consultations or agency seminars. www.fedmen.com has online training that covers all the subjects discussed today. They will also provide recommendations and advice to how to maximize your retirement benefits.

Benefits & Legislative Meeting was called to order. Roll call of each district representative was done.

Benefits that are available: www.nascoe.org, benefits page has all benefits listed. You can be added to an alert list so if anything is added, you will receive an alert.

Dee Ann Lehn, Midwest Area Benefits Chairperson:

- **History:** The agency started in the 30's as the AAA. No provisions for benefits were available for CO employees. There was no annual leave, health insurance, life insurance and retirement for CO employees prior to NASCOE..

- **Cell Phone discounts**-ATT, Verizon, Alltel, US Cellular, Cingular, Sprint, Nextel, and many others offer discounts. The smaller companies do not offer this discount. This has been a very popular benefit with members.
- **Theme and Amusement Parks:** She requested some discount tickets so she will have them on hand. There has been discussion about having a password for NASCOE members so that an outside person looking at the website could not be able to get.
- **Sam's Club membership:** Current offer ends April 11. This is currently only available every six months.
- **NASCOE Attorney:** that is available to all NASCOE members.
- **NASCOE Travel:** this has many deals for members
- **Discounts:** Dell, purchasing power and many others. Check the website for a list of all benefits.

JM Marketing, Trevor Gartner, Michael Reidy, and Larry Chalmers (director of federal benefits): Gave \$100 donation to the IOWA Scholarship Fund. JM Marketing has a 20 year history of working with NASCOE and providing the best policies to the members. They work with many carriers to search out the best products to offer NASCOE members. There is a new cancer program, that has many new things to offer There is a new accident policy. This is a lump sum policy. Trevor explained the policy. There is a critical illness policy with a \$5,000 lump sum available. There is an accidental death policy available for all NASCOE members and you need to fill out a beneficiary form for that. Retirement: JM Marketing has software available to calculate retirement benefits. They offer local seminars, lunch discussions or whatever they can provide based on needs. They are focusing on small trainings and will provide a 10-12 page benefits analysis to NASCOE members. These are all complimentary services. Trevor introduced the new Iowa JM Marketing representative.

CAPWIZ: Tammy Eibey: She discussed alerts and how members are not responding to the alerts as compared to the number of members who are enrolled in CAPWIZ. 236 are subscribed in IA. She will make any corrections and changes to CAPWIZ as needed. She introduced Mike Mayfield.

NASCOE Legislative Co-Chairperson, Mike Mayfield: He thanked Tammy for the tremendous job that she does for NASCOE and its members. He discussed the following:

- **House Ag Subcommittee:** NASCOE was invited to testify regarding the IT system in FSA. The House Ag Appropriations committee had a hearing and the FSA administrator was asked to commit that IT funds would not be diverted to other areas. FSA is late with the January report and the appropriations committee has not been able to get a straight answer as to what happened to IT funds. Some members of congress are concerned about the state of FSA IT abilities or lack thereof. We must be sure to have good computers in order to convince congress that FSA can handle future programs.
- **Health Care:** This passed the house. There are items that will affect FSA employees. There is an excise tax in the bill, but will not take affect until 2018. He described how the excise tax will work. We must monitor the value of the plans and how it could be taxed. The insurance companies will have to pay this excise tax and this cost will be passed on to consumers. OPM will charge managing the new health systems and this will put a strain on processing times. Inclusion of children to age 26 was included in the bill and could be affective 6 months after the bill is signed into law. The passage of the bill decreased the amount of money we can use as a deduction for FED Med pretax purposes. There are many other items in the bill that we all need to be aware of. NASCOE will continue to monitor how this bill will affect members.
- **House Bill 4865:** will allow retirees to roll lump sum payments into TSP. This would help offset the amount of taxes taken out of the lump sum payment. This has been referred to committee and a CAPWIZ alert will be out soon on this. This is already allowed in the private sector.
- **2010 Farm Bill Hearings;** Will start in April, and some are already scheduled. NASCOE will ask that members attend such meetings to monitor on behalf of NASCOE.
- **Climate Bill:** Don't know if this bill will move forward now that the health care bill has passed. It make sense that any carbon credit payments come through FSA.
- **Conservation payments:** FSA should administer conservation program payments and this needs to be monitored. One of the biggest reasons to monitor this is because there is a big push to eliminate direct payments and we will need the conservation payments for FSA workload.
- **Development Plan:** There is a 3-prong approach: using education, a grass roots connection to legislators, coalition partners and critical contacts, and utilizing the NASCOE PAC.
- **PAC:** The PAC has become instrumental in obtaining FSA benefactors in congress. The National Sugar PAC has over \$1 million to use and this is extremely affective concerning sugar programs. The Cotton PAC is next. The NASCOE PAC is growing steadily and some legislators are contacting Redding for NASCOE PAC funds. There are about 200 members in payroll deduction. Even with this small amount of participation, we are still the 27th largest and only \$3,000 behind the National Corn

Growers. We only need 50 more members to pass the National Corn Growers. It does not take a large donation, only about \$3 per pay period would make the NASCOE PAC far more competitive in the legislative arena. There are two promotions: the state with the largest increase will receive \$250 and anyone who initiates an allotment or increases their allotment by \$3 will receive a \$20 gift card.

The Benefits and Legislative Session was adjourned at 3:00 pm

The STC was introduced.

General Assembly Convened at 3:30 pm

Candidacy Announcements:

Midwest Alternate Exec: Dennis Ray, MO: Kathy Post read his announcement
Midwest Area Exec: Charlene Neukomm, IL, announced her candidacy for this position
NASCOE Secretary: Deb Esselman, WI announced her candidacy for this position.

NARFE: Ginny Baker, Des Moines Chapter President: She thanked all for their hard work on behalf of the area farmers. This is an organization for all active and retired federal employees. NARFE is a respected name with legislators. NARFE is very involved with issues that affect ALL federal employees. NARFE worked hard on the getting credit for FERS Sick Leave. Dues are only about \$36 per year. There are over 4,000 members in IA. NARFE is represented by a registered team in Washington DC. You will be notified of any bills before Congress and will also receive the NARFE magazine that is full of information for members. There are membership perks available. The most effective means of change come from our community. There must be a constant pursuit of what is right and just. It doesn't cost to belong to NARFE, it pays. NARFE is also very active on the state level. You can register for a free membership this weekend.

Joe Eslinger: Retired 2 years ago, and found out that retired person's concerns are no longer concerns of the agency you worked for. You have ongoing concerns, and you don't hear much about what life is like after you retire. You must protect your benefits because the agency does not care after you retire. NARFE is an organization that looks out for your benefits and protecting such benefits. It is vital to have a voice with congress and NARFE provides that support.

NASCOE President, Myron Stroup: he introduced himself and discussed the following:

- **Payment Software:** this caused a lot of stress throughout the country. NASCOE has stressed to Washington DC that software should not be issued until tested.
- **FERS Sick Leave:** A defense bill included credit for FERS sick leave and re-employment of retired employees. NASCOE brought this issue up to legislators due to the large turnover of human capital within federal agencies.
- **Vilsack's Memo** regarding a labor management forum: Executive order 13522 outlines the members of this group.
- **NAFEC:** He and John Lohr met with NAFEC last week in Washington DC. NAFEC and NASCOE has had a good relationship. There were 3 meetings scheduled. They met with Undersecretary Merrigan and discussed budget savings to USDA. NASCOE got a paper to her regarding this subject. Hopefully, the seed of thought was planted.
- **MIDAS:** There are a lot of good people in the field who would do well on this project. Employees would have to stay in DC for 2 years and other incentives for working on this project.
- **State Budgets:** many states don't enough money for COC meetings, newsletters, etc. Myron expressed the concerns to the administrator. Budget (or lack thereof) will continue to be a problem.
- **Congressional Hearing:** NASCOE prepared for the hearing by issuing a survey to get some input from members. . The 3 question survey was up for 72 hours and there was a tremendous response. It was a good way to collect data.
- **Website:** there will be video clips posted and a lot of other information. If you have ideas on how to improve the website, please let him know. There will be an introductory video posted for folks considering joining NASCOE.

Q: The moratorium will be coming off in May, how does it look for office closures?

A: The Administrator responded to this by stating that he does not want to close offices. If a county wants to put together a proposal from the COC, producers, staff, etc, he will look at it. NASCOE does not have a position for or against this response.

Q: When the farm bill was in process, Peterson discussed USDA reorganization. Is there any discussion about reorganization at this time?

A: Reorganization was part of the farm bill but was taken out in order to be passed. There has not been much talk about reorganization because other issues have overshadowed it. He is not sure if it will be

included in a new farm bill or not. NASCOE has a lot of ideas on how to reorganize and save money without sacrificing employees. The most important benefit we have is our paycheck.

Adjourned: The meeting was adjourned at 4:20 pm

Evening festivities included a dance and hospitality room that started at 5:30 pm in the Grand Ball Room. There was some amazing talent displayed during the “garden party” including a surprise visit from Tiny Tim and his tulips. Words cannot describe the talent of the Iowa members!

Saturday, March 27, 2010

The Awards presentations started at 8:30 am.

Scholarships, Tammy Pruin: Four \$300 scholarships were awarded and all the winners were in attendance and gave a brief report of their activities.

Devalyn Wilson and Tammy Pruin presented the following awards

Sick leave awards: 1,000, 1,500, 2,000, 2,500 hours and one 3,000 hour award

Distinguished Service Awards: Service to IASCOE/NASCOE and Service to FSA/Agriculture Awards were awarded.

Extra Mile Awards: were presented to two individuals

Iowa General Assembly Reconvenes

Welcome-Cindy Mensen, IASCOE President

Invocation: Alan Donaldson, DD

Presentation of Colors: Boy Scout Troup #43

National Anthem: Julie Vulk, Winneshiek, Co CED

Pledge of Allegiance: Jim Magel, Retiree

Military Tribute: Deb Esselman-Baird, CED, WI, Military Mom

Recognition of 1st Timers

Introduction of new officers: Cindy Mensen, President, Jeff Davis, Vice President, Sue Beemer, Sec/Treas. Cindy introduced the directors and welcomed everyone and thanked them for their support. She also recognized the past presidents.

Committee Reports

- **Membership: Membership Awards, Glenda Von Arb & Mary Lageschulte:** Glenda read the minutes from the Friday Committee Meeting.. 100% membership awards were presented to counties. A 50 year award was presented to Fremont, Jackson, and Johnson counties. Mary Lageschulte, the new membership chairperson presented 15 recipients the honorary lifetime membership.
- **Scholarships:** Tammy Prruin gave the committee report. There were four \$300 scholarships awarded this year and this will be maintained for next year. A suggestion was made to give a paper award for those who did not win an dollar award for reference for the students. There are 22 sick leave awards. The Distinguished Service awards winners were again announced.
- **Publicity:** Cindy Pistek gave the committee report. There were 7 districts were represented at the meeting yesterday. Three WI guests were present. One or two districts will be highlighted in each newsletter. Deadline for submissions is two weeks prior to publishing. Newsletters are issued quarterly. Everyone was encouraged to participate and send in articles. Midwest area awards were presented by the Midwest Area Chairperson to Cindy Pistek for Best Newsletter and Best Single Issue, and Best Humorous Story to Barry Tarhawk. Dee Ann Lehn won for best feature article and WI won for the best Website.
- **Benefits/Legislative:** Kelly Cain gave the benefits/legislative report. She gave the report from Friday’s meeting. Tammy Eibey and Jeff Davs are the Legislative Co-Chairpersons. See Friday’s notes. Dee Ann Lehn is also the Midwest Area Benefits Chairperson.
- **A motion was made and seconded to approve the Committee Reports as read.**

EJ Brown & Associates, Josh Ketcher: Discussed how his company helps employees calculate retirement benefits and they also discuss all your benefits, post and pre-retirement. The goal is help employees get started in the best way to maximize their benefits. A Roth IRA option may be available next year for federal employees.

NASCOE Legislative Co-Chair, Mike Mayfield: There is currently a debate going on regarding compensation for RMA. Chairman Peterson has changed his stance toward crop insurance. They are trying to remove 2-3 million and that would affect the amount of money available for the next farm bill. \$83 million has been discussed for IT for FY 2011. NASCOE will ask for more employees but right now it looks like the staff numbers are the same for 2011. The web is available for those who cannot attend area rallies or the national convention. There will be a question posted to the site regarding more employees. There will be more changes to improve content and accessibility. CAPWIZ is a very important tool and all members should be utilizing this. If you can get 3,000 to 4,000 letters to congress overnight on an issue, it will have an impact. He presented a power point presentation on the PAC. NASCOE has over \$20,000/year in payroll contributions so far. He showed a slide on the number of dollars other agriculture PACS contribute. If only 16% of NASCOE members participated with only a \$3 allotment, we could be 3rd in the nation for Ag PACs. With over 8,000 members, this could be easily attainable. He explained how PAC funds are dispersed. This election cycle that takes place between now and November is very important and NASCOE must keep on top of elected individuals and get their support as early as possible. Allotment enrollment provides a steady source of income, but if a person is not comfortable with an allotment, they can make an individual contribution. Associate members can also make individual contributions.

Midwest Area Alternate, Charlene Neukomm: Iowa membership is at 90% and national membership is 82-83%. This gives NASCOE a big voice with congress. It is important to contact new employees and get them involved and excited. She explained the importance of joining the PAC. CAPWIZ is another big voice and we need to use it when you get alerts. Be sure to hit "send" when reviewing the letters, otherwise, it won't be delivered. She described the negotiation process and how important it is to submit ideas to make jobs more efficient, effective, and run more smoothly. She gave an example of how making a suggestion make a significant difference regarding a specific form. There is a negotiation form on the NASCOE website and be sure making suggestions to offer solutions. The negotiation team goes through every item that is submitted, and those items are reviewed with the management team on the 3rd week of April Conventions: Rally-April 9-10, Indiana-April 17-18, Wisconsin-April 23-24, MI-April 30-May 1, MN-July 23-24, MO-Sept 23-24. The National Convention is the first week of August.

Chairman of STC, John Judge: John introduced two other members of the STC, Gary Lamb, Maria Roseman, Matt Russell, and Richard Mahacheck.. Maria was not in attendance. He welcomed everyone and he grew up on a family farm and how his sons run the farm. The STC has a statutory role in the administration of FSA programs. John Whitaker is the SED and they have been doing visits in the state. Richard gave his email rdm@netins.net so that employees could contact him.

Jeff Davis described the meeting that IASCOE had with the STC.

Chief Administrative Officer, Dennis Olson, was a CED and past IASCOE director. All employees are very dedicated and like to have fun. He is the national chairperson for the organization of the Admin Officers (AOLG) and they work with management on issues for the betterment of FSA. The organization is working on things like WEBTA and other issues. He had discussion with Myron Stroup about COT training material. The AOLG had a significant contribution on the content of the COT training materials, but it needs to be updated. Budget: AOLG talked to senior management of the FY 2010 budget. Training and some other things have been cut back to stay within the budget constraints. There will be information coming out on 2009 performance rewards. Staffing: the number of positions were to stay the same, but all positions will not be funded. Lump sum payments have to come out of the state budget. With the cooperation of the field, they will meet the current demands. There are 576 CO, 156 GS staff positions at this time. No vacant positions will be filled prior to the vacancy occurs. The STO will be taking different approaches to saving money. He commends IASCOE support of the people's gardening initiative.

Iowa SED, John Whitaker: He thanked everyone for attending. He knew that FSA takes care of local farmers and this is something that he knew from being on the other side of the county. He sent several changes to Washington DC since he has been in the STO. He wants everyone to send in suggestions and ideas. Iowa is using sharepoint and Washington is looking at this for possibilities at a national level. The agencies will be successful in the future if they think "yes, if..." and not use "No, because..."

NASCOE President, Myron Stroup: He thanked RASCOE and the retirees. He thanked the award winners and the scholarship winners. He discussed the following:

- **Farm Bill:** there will be hearings in Harrisburg, PA in April. NASCOE will try and make sure members are at the meetings. It will probably be written under the reconciliation process and this may enable things to move more quickly. This administration is supportive of food and nutrition process. But it will probably get ugly before it is all settled. We need to visualize what our workload would be if direct payments were eliminated. This would have a tremendous affect if this were to happen, but there are many groups trying to do such a thing. There are no guarantees that we will have jobs in the

future, these jobs are very dependent on the programs included in the farm bill. The PAC could have an important affect on this.

- **SURE**-this is a four letter word. The EXEL workbook is like a big tablet. The projections are that the IT system is to be fixed by 2014, but this is unacceptable. We need it to work now.
- **Ag Sub Committee Hearing:** in early March, NASCOE was invited to give testimony. This is the 3rd time since 1994 that NASCOE was invited to testify. The subject in March was the FSA IT system. This needs to be fixed before the next farm bill.
- **NAFEC:** NASCOE was at congressional meetings with NAFEC and it is important that the organizations help each other. Myron asked someone from each area to be a NAFEC Liason and he wants to charge this group to get newsletters and information to members and COC members.
- **PT Classification:** this has been in process for a long time, but the wheels of Washington DC move slowly. There is a notice in clearance and the position announced will be a key district contact person. When this is announced, Myron will be in contact with DAFO and NASCOE members to be sure to understand the position and be sure it is utilized.
- **National Convention:** August 4-7 in Hot Springs, AR. At the organizational meeting, they revised the agenda to free up some more time for participants. Be sure to give the board feedback on the agenda.
- **CCC-927 and 928 process:** Myron has encouraged Coppess to send a letter to FSA employees regarding this subject. There is \$3 million (\$2 million from FSA and \$1 million from NRCS) to go to IRS for their assistance in this matter.
- **Family:** NASCOE has been referred to “a family”. This is certainly true and all members help each other as a family should do. NASCOE appreciates membership, but members could do more for the organization. Every contribution from every member is important. Our goal is to be in the top 5 Ag organizations with the PAC and then we will have a much stronger voice with congress.

FSA Coordinator for the People’s Garden Initiative, and the Program Manager for ECP, Katina Hanson:

She has her own pesticide free garden at home and it is a good fit for her. Dennis Olson, the STO AO, is the Iowa point of contact for the People’s Garden Initiative. She had a power point presentation on the People’s Garden Initiative:

- On February 12, 2009, initiative was announced and started. A challenge was issued to employees to start gardens. There is a garden started on the rooftop of the South Ag Building in DC. All the produce from the Washington gardens is donated to a local food bank. The gardens are a collaborative effort. The message that they want to convey is to utilize land that is there to grow food, enhance wildlife, etc.
- The Gardens could benefit the community. If the garden is located on federal land, the produce must be donated to a non-profit organization. The gardens enable social and cultural connections and create teaching opportunities.
- The Gardens promote health and wellness. Eating fresh vegetables and fruits promotes health diets.
- The Gardens help the environment. Can promote sustainable practices, improve water quality, and soil health.
- There was a video presented featuring Mr. Vilsack and explaining the purpose of the people’s gardens. There are 103,000 USDA employees and if everyone participated in this initiative, it could have a very positive impact on this country. www.usda.gov/peoplesgarden/ has information and everyone should go to this website for information.
- Iowa STO has some seeds available if any COF would like to participate. A demonstration was done on how to enter data on a garden into the database.
- There are different types of gardens, such as: rain gardens (to collect rain water), vegetable garden, raised bed garden, school garden, medicinal plant gardens, pollinator garden (to bring in butterflies, etc), landscape garden, native plant garden, and many others.
- She also discussed some ECP programs and regulations. There is an Forest Restoration Program that she briefly described.

Raffle and Auction winners announced

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 12:45 pm.

*Respectfully submitted,
Deborah Esselman*