



LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE UPDATE

Your legislative committee's "RED TEAM" just returned from a week on Capital Hill, where we told over 100 Congressional members and staffers the truth about how competitive sourcing is destroying our agency. Was this a successful trip? You bet, but a lot of work remains to be accomplished before we can say this nightmare we've been living is over. The highlights of our week on the Hill follow.

Our trip was timed to coincide with the beginning of the budget cycle because it is through the power of the purse that Congress may regulate this program. We concentrated on making personal visits with members of both the House and Senate committees on appropriations. We specifically asked that the Agency be prohibited from using any funds for Competitive Sourcing studies and related activities in FY 08. We also asked for the outright prohibition on outsourcing of personnel who support wildfire suppression. We supported our requests with a 54-page briefing book that documented the unmitigated disaster that is competitive sourcing in the Forest Service. A copy is posted on the FSC website at www.nffe-fsc.org/Documents/CSIndex/CSIndex.html.

We also met with key staff of other relevant Congressional committees, including the agency's authorizing committee and homeland security and government oversight committees. We brought up our eroding capability because of past and present competitive sourcing studies to respond to national emergencies with our Incident Command System. It opened a lot of eyes when we explained about the crucial role played by Forest Service responders to homeland security for all risks – not just wildfire. We had more than one staffer express interest in oversight hearings on this issue.

We also continued to stress the systemic problems with the agency's competitive sourcing program. Specifically, that the agency has no effective strategic process for selecting work for A-76 competitions that ensures its long term ability to effectively fulfill its essential missions. The agency also lacks the expertise and infrastructure to perform competent A-76 competitions. Finally, we showed that the costs of performing the competitions are grossly understated and savings claims are purely fictitious.

Everyone also made contact with their personal congressional representatives and delivered a strong message on how competitive sourcing is increasing the difficulties of carrying out our mission of caring for the land and serving the people on the units within their states. At the crux of our argument is that the Forest Service has all the tools and authority it needs at the local level to make the appropriate decisions about how to do our work and a binding A-76 circular process that is incapable of taking into account the diverse duties of Forest Service employees, is akin to forcing a round peg into a square hole and is NOT making us more efficient or effective in accomplishing our mission of caring for the land and serving the people. Furthermore, we are diverting a tremendous amount of increasingly limited time, and dollars that is actually appropriated for resource management on the ground to competitive sourcing. This course is having disastrous effects to Ranger Districts tasked with managing our National Forests.

Also up front and center for our legislative team on this trip to D.C. was the issue of utmost importance in the fire community regarding liability and privilege. It is possible for Congress to pass legislation which would seal and protect administrative investigations whose purpose is to learn from our mistakes from over-zealous prosecutors seeking to bring criminal charges against those who serve. A number of staffers assured us that they were engaged on this issue. You can bet we will be following up on this in a big way.

We will be returning to DC May 13--19/2007 to continue the work on these and other pressing issues to the membership such as:

- retirement issues of increasing the date that federal employees can buy back their seasonal time
- allowing FERS employees to be compensated for their sick leave at retirement,
- the issue of recreation dollars going down while public use is up
- problem solving about what to do about the ever increasing fire costs (this is an issue in which Congress is very interested and engaged)

As we said in the opening of the letter: **THERE IS A LOT OF WORK YET TO ACCOMPLISH.** Please feel free to contact your Legislative Committee members or your Local President with ideas and concerns on any of these issues. As always, as your representatives we appreciate your support and participation in this process. Let us know if you want to get more involved.

Mark Davis, Ron Thatcher Co-Chairs of your Legislative Committee