



**National Federation of Federal Employees**

**NFFE - IAM**

**Pride - Unity - Strength**

**Federal District 1, IAMAW, AFL-CIO**



**FOREST SERVICE COUNCIL  
FSC VOICE**

**November 2009**

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## President's Report



With 2009 quickly coming to a close we need to acknowledge the great things our Union has accomplished these past few months:

- With the signing of the defense authorization bill our employees in the FERS retirement system can now receive credit for unused sick leave.
- We will not see implementation of the National Security Personnel System (NSPS) wherein our pay raises would be subject to the whims of a supervisor.
- Competitive sourcing continues to die in appropriations language and now there is talk of "in-sourcing", where we bring work that was outsourced to contractors back into the capable hands of federal employees where it belongs.

Our legislative team along with the National office worked long hours to obtain these great wins for all of us. We owe them our thanks for yet another job well done.

There is also promising news from the department level. NFFE President Bill Dougan and I met with leadership at USDA and the other Unions that represent USDA employees to begin a dialog to create a Partnership Council. Our meeting was very positive and I believe

there will be a council developed to work on the many issues our agency faces.

While at that meeting the Assistant Secretary was very interested in the decline in morale in our agency and what we felt were some of the underlying reasons. We talked about the huge changes our employees have faced with from the centralization of our IT, B&F and Human Resources programs. These centralizations have resulted in the continuing burden shift and deterioration of service; the piling on of what I call "administrivia" - tasks that are preventing our field folks from doing what they love to do and are paid to do: getting out in the woods and caring for our great natural resources. I told the Assistant Secretary this burden shift has resulted in that we now have "boots under desks rather than boots on the ground" and mission delivery is in jeopardy on many units.

While we didn't have enough time to get into details at this meeting I did let him know that one of my issues is our employees are a resource and a precious one at that. We flat out resent being called Human Capital and we need to change Human Capital Management back to Human Resource Management. The very next day I received an email from him that he was directing the change effective October 1.

If this is what can be accomplished in a short meeting, I'm excited about what we can do when we roll up our sleeves and work in partnership on the many issues facing our proud Agency at the Departmental level. I've always said and continue to say Partnership gives us a way to be part of the solution - and we will certainly do all we can to help fix the problems we see as a hindrance to accomplishing our important work and mission.

As always, I want to acknowledge the Council Executive Board members for their leadership and unbelievable amount of work they accomplish, the chairs of all our committees for

their leadership and vision, the committee members who step up to work on tough assignments, and the Local Officers who are truly the backbone of our union. These tireless champions work day in and day out to serve our bargaining unit employees. It is truly humbling and amazing to be a part of a union filled with people with the work ethic, professionalism, and dedication I see every day. Because of these efforts, we are without a doubt continuing to grow a bigger, stronger and more effective Council and Union.

Finally, as we approach this holiday season, always remember to take time for you and your family. Nothing is more important than you and your families' health and happiness. Remember that family is always your number one priority. My hopes for the upcoming holidays are that you and yours have a safe holiday season and that it be full of joy, happiness, and the best of times! Remember to keep our brave men and women, as well as our own brothers and sisters, who find themselves deployed in harm's way and away from their families in our thoughts and prayers. We can't thank them and their families enough for their sacrifices, but hope they may return home safely and soon to their loved ones and grateful Nation.

I cannot thank each and every one of you enough for all you do every day for all of us, our Union, and Nation as Federal Employees of the Forest Service.

In Solidarity,

*Ron*

## Master Agreement Negotiation Update

Normally, the Master Agreement is negotiated every three years. However, our current Agreement was extended by 2 years. The Agency has undergone a number of changes since the last Agreement was signed in 2005, so the new agreement requires some substantial changes.

We have put our best and brightest on the negotiation team to ensure our Master Agreement continues to be the model federal sector contract. We have compiled all the comments received from our locals and are working hard to incorporate the necessary revisions to the Articles to make the language stronger and clearer. I can tell you a number of articles have been completed, and work continues on other areas of the agreement. Three additional negotiation sessions have been scheduled through January 2010 and it's my hope we can get negotiations completed by this spring.

We all need to thank our Negotiations team for the many weeks, days, and hours of work, along with the sacrifice of precious family time to insure we have a the best contract possible. Believe me, with Melissa Baumann, Eric Plimmer, Lonnie Lewis, Chris Feutrier, Mark Davis, Dave Stamey, Steve Flory, Leslie Boak, and Karen Mora working for us we are in good hands. Without a doubt, our contract will be a better contract and will continue to be the envy of other Federal Sector Unions.

In Solidarity,

*Ron*

## Report from the 2009 Reno Training

By Alex Serrano, Communications Committee  
Region 5s annual Union Officer and Steward Training was in Reno, NV, October 27th - 30th. It was an exciting time to get our feet wet with the complexities of labor relations or, for those who have been dealing with it for a while, getting a refresher and some advanced training.



*Current FSC Ron Thatcher (second from left) with former FSC Presidents (from left) John Obst, Bill Dougan and Larry King*

The attendees were fortunate to have high caliber presenters, such as NFFE National President Bill Dougan, NFFE National Vice President John Obst, FSC Council President Ron Thatcher and FSC Secretary Melissa Bauman among others. Training days were long and there was much to learn, and all the information was essential. There was a full house, with people coming from Forests and Job Corps Centers all over the Nation. People were very involved in the training, asking the right questions and eager to learn. NFFE and FSC leadership were happy to see people from all ages and backgrounds joining the steward ranks, but were especially pleased to see some young people and new employees getting involved with the union. This gives hope that a new generation of unionists will carry the torch,

and keep the labor movement alive and stronger than ever.

A minute of silence was held to honor the memory of labor movement champion and NFFE President Rick Brown, who taken from us last year. Gone but not forgotten, the fruits of his labor are with us still and we hope he is smiling from heaven as he sees a new generation ready to take the lead.

Some topics covered in the training sessions were: basic union structure, the steward's role, recruiting (after hours), legislative update, grievances, alternative dispute resolution and negotiations. A fictitious case study was followed and discussed among the participants as a group exercises, walking the new stewards through the grievance process. This training was an excellent networking opportunity as well, and a time to place names with faces and meet brothers and sisters from all around the Nation. Trainers stressed that facet of the conference as much as the training itself.



*Attendees listen attentively to presentations at the 2009 Reno Officers and Stewards training*

The week was a mere glimpse of the complexities of labor relations. We were sent off with the exhortation to commit ourselves to a lifelong study on this ever changing field to better serve our locals and our agency; but even more important, the labor movement in our Country and the World.

On Friday, we left Reno to go back to our

respective units as changed people, equipped with the basic tools to make a difference for the people in our Agency.

### **NFFE goes to the County Fair - to Meet Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack**

Two of President Obama's cabinet members, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack and Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, made a stop at the LaCrosse County Fair in southwest Wisconsin on July 16th. In the midst of their "Rural Tour," Vilsack and LaHood discussed the Administration's efforts to rebuild and revitalize rural America. See [www.ruraltour.gov](http://www.ruraltour.gov) for more information. Mark Davis, National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE) Forest Service Council Vice President and Legislative Committee Chair, and John Obst, NFFE Vice President, attended the event.



*NFFE-FSC Vice President Mark Davis (right) and NFFE Vice President John Obst (center) meet with Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack in West Salem, Wisconsin. John is a previous NFFE-FSC President.*

The Rural Tour provides an opportunity for the Secretaries to hear first-hand about the challenges facing rural America – and the large and animated crowd did their part to ensure that happened. Rural residents, small farm and business owners, and agriculture workers

described the dire circumstances they currently face. This feedback and input will be used to refine departmental policies and programs to develop new ones. Vilsack and LaHood listened respectfully, described initiatives that might help, and in some cases referred people to staff members for assistance on specific issues.

NFFE representatives Davis and Obst had an opportunity to talk with the USDA Secretary after the forum ended. Davis spoke to Secretary Vilsack about the union's commitment to work with him in rebuilding the infrastructure and workforce of the Forest Service that have been seriously eroded by years of neglect. Obst, noting that NFFE backed President Obama and ascribed to his philosophies, pledged NFFE's support to make the Administration, the Secretary, and the USDA and its employees successful by working together to meet our country's needs. Secretary Vilsack indicated he "looked forward to partnering with the Union."

### **HRM Union Petition in Contention**

The Forest Service is engaged in a campaign to stop many Human Resource Management (HRM) employees from voting on the question of whether to have Union representation.

Why is Forest Service leadership so afraid of allowing HRM employees to have the same rights as other Forest Service employees across the nation? Why does the Forest Service fear Union representation?

Last year, the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE) gathered signatures of HRM employees who desired to vote on the question of whether to have the Union represent them in the workplace. The Union submitted these signatures and an election petition to the Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA) in Dallas, Texas.

The Forest Service wasted no time in challenging the eligibility of many of the employees in the proposed bargaining unit to vote in a Union election, and a hearing was held by the FLRA in Albuquerque in March, 2009. Following the week-long hearing, the FLRA ruled that the large majority of employees holding the disputed positions should be allowed to vote in the Union election.

The Forest Service is now disputing that favorable ruling for the Union by the Dallas FLRA and has appealed the FLRA decision to the FLRA in Washington, DC.

The Union will not be deterred by these Forest Service delaying tactics. The opposition by the Forest Service to allowing the employees to vote on the question of Union representation underscores the need for Union representation at Albuquerque HRM.

Rest assured, The National Federation of Federal Employee is in this fight to the finish.

**Stop The Presses Update:** As the final touches were being put on this issue of the FSC Voice, the NFFE-FSC learned that the FLRA denied the Agency's petition, thus ensuring that a maximum number of Forest Service HRM employees will have the right to choose whether they would like union representation. Conference calls with the FLRA have been scheduled to start moving forward on a vote to include the hard-working HRM employees in the Forest Service NFFE consolidated bargaining unit.

## Pathfinders Honors an Ally

By Jerry Smith, Pathfinders Chair

*"The Pathfinders Employee Resource Group recognizes Melissa Baumann for superior and passionate service assisting employees with*

*FSC Voice, November 2009*

*disabilities to obtain access to the full privileges of employment with the US Forest Service...."*

That's an excerpt from a letter of appreciation to Melissa Baumann of the Forest Products Lab and the Forest Service Union, honoring her work to ensure that workable reasonable accommodations directives are published in a usable format, and that they will be updated in a final version as USDA regulations unfold. Melissa served as the lead Union representative on a committee appointed to address this critical need. Jerry Smith, Pathfinders chair, also served on the negotiations committee.



*FSC President Ron Thatcher presenting Melissa Bauman with a letter of appreciation from Pathfinders*

The directives, which most units "live or die" by, codify procedures we must take in our jobs. It has been said, "If it doesn't exist in the directives, it doesn't exist in the Forest Service."

Ron Thatcher, National Federation of Federal Employees president, made the presentation before senior Forest Service and Union leaders at the Forest Service Partnership Council meeting in Tallahassee, Florida.

Presented with the letter was a token of appreciation -- a Louis Braille commemorative silver dollar.

The coin features a full size, accessible Braille depiction of the letters Brl (short for braille, which provides people with visual disabilities access to the written word).



The coin is one of only 400,000 such collectible coins struck by the US Mint. Proceeds from purchase of the coin go to Braille literacy efforts, and the Braille figure on the coin (BRL, for Braille) is actual Braille size.

It was carefully selected as a token for Melissa, and we hope that she will “see” it as a sincere expression of how much we appreciate her work to provide accessibility literacy in the US Forest Service. The presentation was funded by member donations.

The Pathfinders organization recognizes Melissa’s outstanding contribution as the lead Union representative on the committee appointed by the FS Partnership Council to resolve issues and develop policy regarding the Reasonable Accommodation process.

**Forest Service employee receives degree from AFL-CIO National Labor College**

By Lisa Wolfe, Communications Committee

You may have noticed a piece in the Summer 2009 IAM Journal highlighting IAM members who had earned college degrees from the AFL-CIO’s National Labor College in Silver Spring, MD. What I noticed was one of our Forest

Service employees and fellow union member among the group of honorees!

Estella Payne, an employee of the Curlew Job Corps Center, received a Bachelor of Arts in Labor Studies from the National Labor College June 26, 2009.



Estella found out about the program while she was at a Leadership course at the IAM’s Winpisinger Center. A representative of the College visited the class and encouraged union members and officials to consider attending. Estella was hooked.

Estella already had an Associate’s degree and was able to translate much of that to count towards her general education credits. She was also able to convert life experience to college credit. You have the opportunity to write papers outlining your experience; if the paper passes a review board, that time will be also be applied to your general education credits. Some programs at Winpisinger are also accredited and can also be used for college-degree programs.

Much of the course work was done from home. “I had to go to the college site 4 times over 2 years – about a week each time,” Estella said. And motivation - how difficult is it to work on a degree program from home? “The teachers were really good to work with and would work with you on schedules and course work” said Payne.

Estella finished her program in 2 years, but, she said, the amount of time it takes to complete really depends on the individual.

This unusual opportunity for a college degree is yet another benefit of Union membership. For information about the program, contact Charlie Micallef of IAM at 301-373-3300.

## Legislative Committee Report

By Mark Davis, Legislative Committee Chair

Last year during Legislative Conference, we emphasized a number of issues faced by our firefighters. In addition, we were honored to be asked to testify before Congress about the reasons for the Forest Service's woeful morale ranking: 206 out of 216.

This year, in addition to following up on these issues, we plan to prioritize the issue of how employees are abused and exploited by inappropriate use of temporary hiring authorities. Temporary employees are ineligible for retirement, life insurance, and health insurance benefits. We brought this issue to the attention of over a hundred Congressional representatives and staffers last year. In general, they were receptive but wanted more information. This year, we are collecting data and employee comments with a survey. We will use this factual documentation to bolster the credibility of our case. We'll be using the survey data to go into greater depth on the scope of the problem, and be developing specific legislative proposals.

The last time temporary hiring reform was attempted was on September 13, 1994. In the Federal Register, OPM stated as its goal that "temporary employees should serve no more than 2 years (24 months) without benefits." Current regulations do not achieve this intent, nor does agency practice. Of the 9,513 temporary employees on the FS roles on 6/10/09:

- 2,734 had 2 or more years of service

- 1,022 had 5 or more years of service
- 361 had 10 or more years of service

Some temporary employees are able to obtain health insurance for other sources, but most are not. According to preliminary survey results, from 1995 through 2009, 59-68% of our temporary employees went without health care. Their personal accounts of the hardships, and in some cases tragedies, they have endured are appalling.

OPM acknowledged that their 1994 reform was not comprehensive, but said they anticipated that needed legislation was on the horizon. This legislation was never enacted. The work to reform this intolerable situation remains unfinished. It is long overdue.

In addition to our legislative efforts, we will be working with agency leadership and administration officials to address the issue. Legislation is required to force agencies to do the right thing, but they may also choose to do the right thing within the existing statutory framework. We believe that inappropriate use of the 1039 temporary hiring authority contributes significantly to the agency's morale problem. Effects on morale and effectiveness extend beyond those directly affected to their brothers and sisters on the fire lines and on the Forests who bear witness to the unethical exploitation to which they are subjected. In addition, it causes us to lose or marginalize many employees who have so much more to give – it sacrifices long-term development of human capital for short-term savings realized on the backs of these workers. We have asked leadership to hold field managers accountable if they repeatedly hire temporary employees to perform work of a permanent or recurring seasonal nature, and also to work with us for comprehensive reform.

This will be a long, hard battle. The economy is in bad shape and the federal budget is deeply in the red. But it is a simple matter of justice: the

government should not treat its employees worse than Wal-Mart does!

Please see the Legislative Action page on the Council website ([www.nffe-fsc.org](http://www.nffe-fsc.org)) for more information on this and other work of the Legislative Committee.

## NFFE News Briefs

### **Susan Tsui Grundmann Confirmed as MSPB Chairman**

Friday, November 6, 2009

(National Federation of Federal Employees)

National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE) General Counsel Susan Tsui Grundmann yesterday afternoon was confirmed by the Senate to serve as the next Chairman of the Merit Systems Protection Board.

[Click here to read entire article](#)

### **Federal Workers in Alaska, Hawaii, and U.S. Territories to get Pension Increase and Locality Pay**

Friday, November 6, 2009

(National Federation of Federal Employees)

Nearly 20 years after the passage of the Federal Employees Pay Comparability Act, legislation that established the federal locality pay structure but left those stationed in Alaska, Hawaii, and the U.S. territories out of the system, federal workers from these areas will soon be getting justly compensated for their

service.

[Click here to read entire article](#)

### **With Defense Bill Passed, FERS Employees to Receive Retirement Credit for Unused Sick Leave**

Friday, October 30, 2009

(National Federation of Federal Employees)

This week, President Obama signed the 2010 National Defense Authorization Act. While a full repeal of the National Security Personnel System (NSPS) dominated headlines, one largely underreported aspect of the bill – and arguably one of the most important for federal employees throughout the civil service – was a provision extending credit for accrued sick leave to federal workers enrolled in the Federal Employee Retirement System (FERS).

[Click here to read entire article](#)

### **NSPS Officially Repealed as President Obama Signs Defense Bill**

Wednesday, October 28, 2009

(National Federation of Federal Employees)

Today, President Obama signed the 2010 National Defense Authorization Act. Included in the bill was a provision to repeal the controversial National Security Personnel System (NSPS). The bill also contained several small provisions impacting retirement benefits for the federal workforce.

[Click here to read entire article](#)

# ***National Federation of Federal Employees***

**Quarterly Newsletter of the Forest Service Council**



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