



**National Federation of Federal Employees**

**NFFE - IAM**

**Pride - Unity - Strength**

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



**FOREST SERVICE COUNCIL  
FSC VOICE**

**SPECIAL ISSUE  
2009 Legislative Week**

**Table of Contents**

	Page
Legislative Briefing papers	2
Legislative Committee Chair Report	3
Legislative Week 2009 "A Huge Success!"	4
What do we do in DC?	5
Attendee Reactions to Legislative Week	6
President's Report	7
Firefighters say "Good riddance!" to Medical Standards Boondoggle	9
Trees Planted in Memory of Sherrill Cornell	11

<b>FSC 2008-2012 Committees and Chairs</b>		
<u><i>Forest Service Partnership Council</i></u> Ron Thatcher Melissa Baumann Dan Duefrene David Stamey  <u><i>Budget and Finance</i></u> Barry McDonald  <u><i>Civil Rights</i></u> Randy Gonzalez	<u><i>Communications</i></u> Jennifer Hickenbottom  <u><i>Fire</i></u> Robert Ethridge  <u><i>Grievance</i></u> Lonnie Lewis  <u><i>Legislative</i></u> Mark Davis	<u><i>Negotiations</i></u> Eric Plimmer  <u><i>Recruitment</i></u> Plez West  <u><i>Safety</i></u> Randy Meyer  <u><i>Training</i></u> Melissa Baumann  <u><i>Veterans</i></u> Dave Chevalier



### **2009 Legislative Week Attendees**

*Front row, from left: Bevin Feutrier, Ricky Gooden, Nancy Soriano, Lisa Wolfe, Claudia Narcisco*

*Middle row, from left: Coral Tily, Renee Crawford, Jennifer Hickenbottom, David Stamey, John Olson, Bryan Clonts*

*Back row, from left: Joe Drozdowski, Dante Whittaker, Ron Thatcher, Mark Davis, Gerry Ann Howlett, Barry McDonald*

*Ramon DeLeon, Bob Beckley*

*Not pictured: Dan Duefrene*

### **2009 Forest Service Council Congressional Briefing papers**

[Rebuilding the Wildland Firefighter Workforce](#)

[Federal Land Assistance, Management and Enhancement Act \(The FLAME Act\)](#)

[Oral testimony of Ron Thatcher, President NFFE Forest Service Council](#) before the House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands

### **2009 NFFE Congressional Briefing papers**

[Support Retirement Reform for the Federal Civil Service](#)

[Repeal Donald Rumsfeld's National Security Personnel System \(NSPS\)](#)

[Non-Foreign Area Retirement Equity Assurance Act](#)

[Support the Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act](#)

[Support Pay Parity for Civilian Federal Employees](#)

[Support the CLEAN UP Act](#)

[Social Security Fairness Act of 2009 \(GPO/WEP\)](#)

[Collective Bargaining for VA Nurses and Doctors](#)

## Legislative Week Report

By Mark Davis, Legislative Chair

This year's Legislative Week was again a resounding success. Your union sent a total of 19 attendees. We met with approximately 100 staffers and members of Congress. Our message was well received.

With competitive sourcing defeated, we turned our attention to other issues. We distributed President Ron Thatcher's testimony on the morale of the Forest Service workforce to increase awareness of the challenges caused by centralization and downsizing of essential support operations. There is no legislative fix for this: we must work within the agency and department to address these problems. However, Congress does have oversight responsibilities and their continued interest is important in keeping this issue on the front burner. This issue was covered in the Washington Post, in a June 10th article in which both Ron and I were quoted. This keeps the pressure on to address the problems.

We also supported the FLAME Act in a separate brief, expressing our concerns about some amendments. Finally, we took on a number of issues that affect our wildland firefighters:

- Stopping the clear and present danger of one-size-fits-all use of GS-0401 and properly classifying firefighters and fire managers
- Implementing an ordered standby (24-pay) for firefighting personnel in closed camps
- Protecting safety witness statements to create a true no-fault environment in which candid disclosures and discussions can lead to improved safety

- Stopping temporary hiring abuse, in which employees are re-hired for years and even decades without pension, health care, or other benefits

Things have been happening rapidly on the classification and safety issues. On classification, the agency recently "stood down" its conversion of fire program managers to the GS-0401 series. And a policy was just implemented to make safety investigations more independent. See [http://www.nffe-fsc.org/documents/updates/june\\_1\\_2009.php](http://www.nffe-fsc.org/documents/updates/june_1_2009.php). I was in DC the week of June 8th following up on both of these developments. While these are both positive developments, there is still a lot of work to do to move them both to a positive conclusion. It never stops!

In addition to Hill visits we made some excellent connections with newly-installed Executive Branch officials at the Department and at OPM. We received a very positive reception at these visits. These connections will be invaluable to us. Many of the problems we face cannot be fixed by legislation. We need to engage agency and Department leadership to move forward. We found out that we will have an open door to work on these issues with the Department. We look forward to working with them.

All attendees deserve our thanks for stepping up and carrying our message to our nation's leaders. Before signing off, I want to send special thanks to Lisa Wolfe for scheduling the vast majority of the Council appointments and continuing work to develop a database with which we can track our Legislative work, to Coral Tily for helping with logistics, to Claudia Narcisco for collaborating on the FLAME Act brief, to Krista Gebert for providing invaluable information and insights to our Fire Brief, and to others too numerous to mention who provided help and support behind the scenes.

## Legislative Week 2009 "A Huge Success!!"

This week, NFFE-IAM members from across the nation packed into the Hyatt Regency Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. for four days of networking, speeches, and political activism. Throughout the conference, NFFE members heard speeches from key figures in Congress and Labor. Then, they met with their elected representatives to discuss issues that affect them as federal employees.

This year's political speakers at the conference were:

Labor Secretary Hilda Solis

Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA)

Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA)

House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD)

Rep. Norm Dicks (D-WA)

Rep. Larry Kissell (D-NC)

Rep. George Miller (D-CA)

Rep. Bob Filner (D-CA)

Rep. Laura Richardson (D-CA)

Rep. Raul Grijalva (D-AZ)

Rep. Shelley Berkley (D-NV)

Rep. Bob Filner (D-CA)

Rep. Gene Green (D-TX)

Rep. Russ Carnahan (D-MS)

Senator Bernard Sanders (I-VT)

Rep. Alcee Hastings (D-FL)

Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT)

Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (District of Columbia)

Tom Trotter – Labor and Congressional Liaison,  
Union Sportsmen's Alliance/Theodore  
Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

Timothy Keating, Senior Vice President Public  
Policy – The Boeing Company

House Majority Leader – Steny Hoyer

Richard Trumka, Secretary/Treasurer AFL-CIO

Gregory Dahlber, Senior Vice President  
Washington Operations – Lockheed Martin  
Corporation

Bill Press, Nationally syndicated Radio Talk  
show Host, Best Commentator of the Year by  
Associated Press, Author



*IAM Conference, Richard Brown,  
NFFE President speaking*

NFFE-FSC Legislative week is held in conjunction with the IAM Legislative Conference. The conference featured a full line up of speakers, all strong supporters of labor in America. Representative Hoyer stopped to take a photograph with FSC members.

## What do we do in DC?

For five days in early May, representatives of NFFE Locals from Alabama to Alaska met in Washington D.C. to carry issues from Forest Service employees to the halls of congress. We met the morning of May 11 to fine tune our strategy. Mark Davis, FSC legislative affairs director, emphasized credibility is hard earned and easily lost; to be most effective we must speak truth to power with individual voices and a common well honed message.



*Mark Davis presenting the Forest Service Council issues to other NFFE Legislative Week attendees*

There are many issues that affect federal employees that can only be addressed legislatively, and many of those issues are specific to Forest Service employees. While corresponding with our representatives in Congress is important for us all to do as individuals, there is no substitute for speaking to power where power resides. Congress considers many matters, and it is important that we inform them of our concerns on behalf of the employees we represent, and the agency we work for. We do this so the legislature can base their decisions on quality information. That is what your peers are doing when they participate in Legislative Conference: providing Congress with the best information we can.

Union representatives were received by over 100 Congressional representatives and staffers who have the ability to influence legislation and effect change. Our positions for 2009 ranged from support for the FLAME Act, to championing firefighter issues to strengthening labor-management partnerships. Firefighter issues covering OPM classifications, pay reform, privilege in safety investigations, and abuse of temporary 1039 appointments were our high priority. These issues were new to many of the offices visited but we felt a genuine interest and a true appreciation for our wildland firefighters. Phones were ringing at offices with potential to change policy before the week was out.

Our request to strengthen labor-management partnerships also rang clear with real life stories of costly management decisions that have created chaos in the Agency and lowered employee morale; decisions such as ASC and GovTrip.

Other issues we carried included the CleanUp Act (S. 924) to remedy abuse in procurement and contracting; Retirement Reform for the Federal Civil Service (H.R. 1256) that includes FERS Sick Leave, reminding Federal agencies of their obligation to hire veterans with ARRA funds and to spend those stimulus funds in their local communities.



*Bob Beckley with Secretary of Labor, Hilda Solis*

## Attendees' reactions to the experience

Excerpts from participants' reports:

"This was truly an eye opening experience for me... I greatly appreciate all the hard work the Union does for the Forest Service employees and the Union reps did pound the pavement and knock on doors."

"I felt the week was productive and very enjoyable. Walking the hill is a life enhancing experience"

"I enjoyed speaking about veteran's issues, and I enjoyed speaking about issues important to our fire fighters and to our agency in the realm of Fire. I will again return to D.C. in 2010, if appointed by the Forest Service Council. It is an experience I can highly recommend. I encourage all Members to get outside their comfort zone and consider getting involved."



*Gerry Ann Howlett  
organizing briefing  
papers outside  
Rep. Jeff Flake's  
(AZ 06) office*

"It is a unique experience to be welcomed into your legislator's office to speak on behalf of the many voices you have heard over the years; in your offices, over lunch and around the many districts you have worked. My only hope was that I could bring some of these stories, some of your pressing concerns to their attention."

"I felt very humbled and privileged to represent the most dedicated public servants in the

federal workforce; which are Forest Service employees."

"This is my second year attending Legislative Week, and I think it is the coolest opportunity I've had in my history with the Forest Service. As in last year, the engaging aspect of this event is being part of the process working for positive change in the FS."

"This was my fourth year and I look forward to participating again in the near future. As always, the Legislative Team works very hard to represent all of the hard working Forest Service employees. We believe that "our voices were heard on the hill"."

"It made me feel like I am doing my part as a Union member not only for myself but for the thousands of other employees that my voice could be affecting."

"Telling members of Congress about our issues is something that makes me feel like I am really doing something to make things better."

"This is your government, your union and your opportunity to participate. I encourage all of you to become a member and consider the trip to DC. So much work is being done on your behalf; not just to maintain your rights but to make your agency, your office and your government work better."



*Dante Whittaker (l) and Ricky Gooden(r) meet with Rep.  
Artur Davis (AL 07)*

View all Legislative Week participants' full reports at:

<http://www.nffe-fsc.org/committees/legislative/>

## President's Report



By now, most of you probably know about NFFE President Rick Brown's unexpected and untimely demise on June 30, 2009. He was 47. With the passing of Brother Rick Brown, we lost a truly great leader who made our Union one that every federal employee can be proud of. Indeed, NFFE exists today only because of the hard work and leadership exhibited by Brother Rick during the darkest days of our existence. Under his stewardship, we have grown from a union whose very survival was at risk to become one of the strongest and proudest advocates for federal employees in the country.

Brother Rick was an inspiration to us all. He inspired us to reach higher and fight harder for the greater good. He inspired us to take pride in being a unionist and in advancing the labor movement. Brother Rick had the ability to always fire you up and re-energize you. He fought the good fight himself, to his last breath, and he inspired us all to fight the good fight every day, with all of our strength.

I'm a better unionist and a better person because of our Brother Rick Brown. I will miss him deeply. He was taken from us much too soon. Let us all pause for reflection, and offer up a prayer of thanks for his life and his leadership. And then, with his life as an example to stir us onward, let us work with

renewed commitment and vigor to bring justice to the federal workplace. Brother Rick would have wanted it no other way.

Pursuant to the NFFE Bylaws, NFFE Secretary-Treasurer Bill Dougan now assumes the presidency. Brother Bill was my predecessor as Forest Service Council President. In this role, he was a leader of the highest caliber. I am confident he will do great job as NFFE President. I know Brother Bill can count on our support as he assumes his new role under these painful and difficult circumstances.

We also have some changes to our Council Executive Board to announce. Bill Self is retiring to take a job with the FIAT motor company as a Labor Relations advisor. I want to thank Bill for his service to our Union and the great work he has done providing leadership and representation for the many men and women working in Region 4. I have appointed Renee Crawford to serve as Region 4 Vice-President pending election of a permanent replacement.

In addition, one of my closest dearest friends, Betsy Evans, Regional Vice President for the great Northern Region, plans to retire in the near future. It has been my privilege to know and to have worked with Betsy for many years. Betsy has not only been a close friend but a wonderful mentor. I will miss her more than she can possibly know. We all owe Betsy our thanks for her knowledge, skills, enthusiasm and tireless commitment to our employees. We are a better union because of Betsy. Ron Angel will serve as Region 1 Vice-President until an election can be held.

Please join me in thanking Bill and Betsy for their service and in wishing them much happiness in the next chapter of their lives.

There is new leadership at the Forest Service and Department as well. We welcome our new Chief, Tom Tidwell, and we've already reached out our hand to work in partnership with him

on the many challenges we find ourselves facing. I hope to meet with Chief Tidwell personally in the near future to discuss how we can work together to improve our agency. In welcoming Chief Tidwell, we also extend our thanks to Chief Gail Kimbell for her service to our agency. Anyone who knew her knew that Chief Kimbell truly cared about the agency and its mission. She will be missed.

We'd also like to welcome the new Department Deputy Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment, Jay Jensen. Mark Davis and I recently met with Deputy Undersecretary Jensen and his staff to discuss how to move the agency forward. We look forward to working with them in the years to come.

These past few years have been full of change, challenge, and turmoil. I don't believe in the history of the Forest Service have our agency and employees been made to endure what they have these past few years. We've seen decisions that have had a profound effect to many of our bargaining unit employees; not only in their professional, but personal lives as well. For example, employees were uprooted and agency capacity crippled by the centralization of our IT, budget and fiscal, and human resources organizations. Our once proud Agency has slipped to a rating of 206 out of 216 best places to work in government in a recent survey of Forest Service employees. Working for the Federal Bureau of Prisons was rated better than the working for the Forest Service.

These ineffective changes have brought employee morale to a level lower than I've ever seen. Many, but not all, were a result of forced mandates from the Department of Agriculture, and the White House Office of Management and Budget. These changes have demonstrated the fallacy of top-down management where change is driven by the dictates of the ill-informed few rather than by the knowledge and wisdom of those on the ground who actually do

the work on behalf of the American tax-payer. This is the fundamental purpose of a union: to empower those in the trenches to speak up and carry the message and perspective of the hard working base to those in power so they might make effective decisions and policy for the benefit of the Agency and the communities we serve. While the last several years have been frustrating, even overwhelming at times, we have undeniably achieved much for our employees as well as for the agency. We testified before Congress about these pervasive problems. We advocated for effective change with agency and Department leaders. And change may finally be coming. Hang in there, my brothers and sisters. The Ship of State doesn't turn on a dime. But folks are listening, and sleeves are being rolled up. I truly believe the time of healing has begun.

While there are those who are pessimistic about our future, I am not among them. Our union is ready and willing to work with Chief Tidwell, Deputy Undersecretary Jensen, and others to address these challenges, to reinvigorate the best workforce in government, and to restore the Forest Service's standing as an employer of choice.

We will continue to work in partnership with agency leadership whenever possible to address the pervasive problems that confront us. In addition, we will continue to fulfill our responsibilities for justice in the workplace. Critical to this more traditional role is our upcoming renegotiation of our national Master Agreement. We've also put significant effort into improving communications from the Council to members. Keep an eye open for updates on Master Agreement negotiations and other topics from "NFFE."

Our recent losses in leadership remind me that our effectiveness as a union depends entirely on our membership. We are strong only if employees join up, and then step up. Building

membership, both through organizing new units and building up our existing Locals must continue to be a priority. We simply must increase Local membership to the minimum level of 35 members as required by IAM. IAM has been more than patient in waiting for some of our smaller Locals to grow, but the time is fast approaching when Locals that cannot meet this level will be consolidated. There is simply no getting around the fact that employees ARE the union. If employees don't step up, the reality is that you don't have a real union presence on your unit. If you wish to build up your Local rather than see it consolidated with another in a different location, please contact me or Plez West, our Recruitment Committee Chair and we will do whatever we can to support you.

Membership is vital, but we also need to encourage members to take the next step - to get active. We must do better, and I am confident we can do better, at encouraging members to step up and serve. We need to make a conscious effort to mentor and grow future leaders of our union and Council. While we are a very effective union we are also an aging union in leadership positions. Many of our current leadership are beginning to count the days until they will be able to retire. The national workload is heavy, and currently, the numbers available to accomplish it are not great. We need to recruit more Local officials to help with the burden carried by our overworked Executive Board members, Committee Chairs, and small cadre of volunteers.

In closing, I would like to thank you all for the privilege to serve as your President these past years. 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. You have my thanks and my admiration. Together, if we decide we will, we can without a doubt continue to grow a bigger, stronger, and more effective union.

In Solidarity,

*Ron*

### **Fire Fighters Say Good Riddance to Medical Standards Boondoggle**

By Dave Stamey, Region 8 Vice-President

In early December 2008, a team of Forest Service Council officials met with Management Representatives in Salt Lake City, Utah, to discuss the continuing saga of medical standards in the Forest Service. We identified and discussed the many issues from around the country that were keeping fire fighters off the line. Minor conditions, such as color blindness, were stopping firefighters from being on the line. Many were attempting to get waiver accommodations and the constant need for additional medical information was fast becoming an onerous employee expense.

A briefing paper written by Region 8 Fire concurred with the Forest Service Council position: "With Region 8 in fire and prescribed burn season, we have a large number of our arduous wildland workforce that has NOT been "cleared" to take the WCT. Most concerning is the handful of critical fire personnel that are still in "Not Cleared" or "Pending" status and no idea when their status will change." The Medical Standards program was allegedly

designed as a means of qualifying, not disqualifying fire fighters.

Early in the development of the medical standards program, management was warned by the Union these issues would prevent the agency getting seasoned fire fighters on the line. With little regard for these warnings management plowed ahead thus ham stringing the agency and fire fighters in a bureaucratic mess.

In March 2009 the Forest Service Council had enough. A grievance was filed with the agency to address several issues. The agency failed to have a plan to address the cessation of the program due to no contract. In the vacuum, several locations began to implement their own plans, which were inconsistent with the terms of previously negotiated agreements. Also, during the same period of time, the National Wildland Coordinating Group (NWCG) attempted to impose its will upon the agency without the benefit of negotiations with the Forest Service Council.

After the grievance we quickly worked with management to develop a transition plan from the previous program to a new program. We are currently using the transition plan to clear Fire Fighters for arduous duty. There is no other program in use currently any where in the agency.

Recently, management contacted the Forest Service Council to begin developing a new medical standards program. Management and the Forest Service Council have shared interest in developing the new program collaboratively.

The interests are:

- The program must produce minimal impact on field users who interact with it.
  
- The program must be transparent to employees; requests for information from

employees will be clear as to what is being requested, when the information is due, and who should receive it.

- Questions from employees about any aspect of the program must be answered promptly and in plain English.
- The program will gather the minimum amount of information needed to protect employee safety and health, focusing on medical conditions that have historically contributed to firefighter death or injury.
- Medical information gathered in association with this program will be kept confidential.
- Costs associated with this program will be kept as low as possible while maintaining adequate levels of service.
- A baseline medical exam will be developed and used to measure the effects of Wildland Fire work over time.
- Security, custody and control of previous medical exams and records must be adequate
- Other FS programs are developing medical standards; we have an interest in consolidating these into one program.

We are also looking at a Resolutions Team to address issues that arise from unforeseen situations. Although we have experience with the previous medical standard program there will be incidents that will need attention.

## Trees Planted in Memory of Sherrill Cornell

On May 30, 2008, the National Federation of Federal Employees and the Forest Service lost a devout and loyal Union steward and dedicated employee. Sherrill (Cruzen) Cornell passed away at her home in Westwood, California with friends and family at her side. Sherrill was 62 years old. After an initial bout with cancer in 2003, she underwent surgery and radiation treatments. She was healthy and active for the next four years. During the summer of 2007, the cancer had metastasized to her lungs, and eventually to her brain.

Sherrill worked on the Lassen National Forest for approximately 30 years. Most of her career was spent in Chester on the Almanor Ranger District. She held a variety of jobs in timber, and special uses while in Chester. The last ten+ years of her career were spent serving bargaining unit employees as the President of Local 2153, from the Lassen National Forest Headquarters in Susanville, California.

Our sister Sherrill was a force to be reckoned with, as her passion for representing employees was strong and unwavering. She was a true believer in the labor movement, and was a proud, longtime member of NFFE.

On April 30, 2009, two native dogwood trees were planted in front of the Almanor Ranger District office in Chester, California, in memory of Sherrill.

*Dan Duefrene, NFFE  
Regional Vice  
President for Region 5,  
is shown holding the  
Union plaque honoring  
Sherrill that will be  
mounted between the  
two trees. Also in the  
photo are Almanor RD  
NFFE members along  
with other Almanor  
Ranger District  
employees.*



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

Quarterly Newsletter of the Forest Service Council



**www.nffe-fsc.org**

Visit <http://www.nffe-fsc.org> to stay informed about what your union does for you

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

For questions, comments, or to submit information for the newsletter, please contact the Communications Committee or one of the Committee members listed below:

**[NFFE FSC Communications@fsnotes](mailto:NFFE_FSC_Communications@fsnotes)** (internal FS only)

Jennifer A. S. Hickenbottom, [jhickenbottom@fs.fed.us](mailto:jhickenbottom@fs.fed.us) (Chair)

Connie Hendryx, [chendryx@fs.fed.us](mailto:chendryx@fs.fed.us)

Cindy White, [cwhite@fs.fed.us](mailto:cwhite@fs.fed.us)

Lisa Wolfe, [ljwolfe@fs.fed.us](mailto:ljwolfe@fs.fed.us)

Alex Serrano, [alexherrano@fs.fed.us](mailto:alexherrano@fs.fed.us)

Lance Hamann, [lancehamann@fs.fed.us](mailto:lancehamann@fs.fed.us)

Karen Mora, [kmora@fs.fed.us](mailto:kmora@fs.fed.us)

Dan Huebner, [dhuebner@fs.fed.us](mailto:dhuebner@fs.fed.us)

Mark Davis, [mwdavis01@fs.fed.us](mailto:mwdavis01@fs.fed.us)