

THE 740 EXPRESS

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF RETIRED FEDERAL EMPLOYEES, CHAPTER 740

APRIL - MAY 1997

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Your Washington Representatives:

Senator Arlen Specter, United States Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510. Local phone (215) 597-7200
Senator Rick Santorum, United States Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510. Local phone (215) 864-6900
8th Congressional District:
Congressman James C. Greenwood, U.S. Congress, Washington, D.C. 20515 Local phone (215) 348-7511
13th Congressional District:
Congressman Jon D. Fox, U.S. Congress, Washington, D.C. 20515. Local phone (215) 885-3500

Next Chapter Meetings: Our next meetings will be on April 17 and May 15 at the Warrington Motor Lodge, Route 611 (just North of Street Rd.) at 12:00 Noon. Call Beryl Fogelsanger (343-3467) early in the week for reservations

Need Help?: Call the Federal Retiree Assistance Center, (215) 597-0419. The Center is located at the Federal Building, Rm. 1208, 6th and Arch Sts, Philadelphia, and handles OPM/FEHB problems only (incorrect payments, non-receipt of checks, etc). Office hours are 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Clinton's 1998 Budget Proposal: As expected, President Clinton's 1998 budget proposal contains provisions to delay federal employee COLAs each year from 1998 to 2002 and increase working employee contributions to their retirement by half a percent of salary, phased in over three years. The COLA delay would only affect federal retirees, not military retirees or Social Security recipients. His proposals would save the government \$6.3 Billion. There is growing opposition to the COLA delays from both sides of the aisle in Congress. Calling the plan unfair for singling out federal retirees, the Republican Chairman (Fred Thompson - Tennessee) of the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee and the ranking committee Democrat (John Glenn - Ohio) wrote Senate Budget Committee Chairman Pete Domenici (R/NM) that equity demands that all retirees be treated equally. Recently, Senator Thad Cochran (R/MS), Chairman of a Senate Subcommittee that deals with federal employment issues, told a NARFE Legislative/Membership Conference that he will oppose any and all attempts to continue singling out federal retirees for COLA delays. He also said any changes in the measurement of the CPI should be based solely on empirical data on the accuracy of the CPI - not for political reasons and not to just find money to help balance the budget. In the House, Representative Connie Morella (R/MD) introduced a resolution (HR 13) that would end the practice of singling out federal retirees for COLA cuts. Although this resolution only attempts to establish the feelings of Congress and is non-binding, it will create an environment that would discourage representatives from supporting such legislation. NARFE Chapters have been working hard to persuade their Congressmen to co-sponsor this resolution (see next article). Thus far, the resolution has 113 co-sponsors in the House. Senator Paul Sarbanes (D/MD) has also introduced a similar resolution in the Senate (Concurrent Resolution 7). Original co-sponsors of this resolution are Sens. Barbara Mikulski (D/MD), John Warner (R/VA) and Daniel Akaka (D/HA).

Meeting With Congressman James Greenwood (8th CD, PA): On February 21, a delegation of local NARFE Chapter and regional representatives visited with Congressman Greenwood. The primary objective of this meeting was to convince Congressman Greenwood to co-sponsor Connie Morella's House Resolution 13 (HR 13) calling for equity for federal retirees. Taking the lead, as prearranged by 740 President Max Schwartz, our John DeMatteo began with a review of the conclusions reached at the last meeting. Namely, that federal retirees have been singled out from social security recipients and other retirees because they lack political clout; that the willingness of Congress to raise money for our COLAs and not the money credited to our CSDRF is the determining factor; that the CSDRF gives Congress the right to raise moneys, but the CSDRF is not a source of real money in itself. John pointed out that we federal retirees know that there is a deficit problem and we are willing to make sacrifices along with everyone else; but, as a matter of fairness, we alone should not be singled out for pension cuts. John also informed Congressman Greenwood that the \$137 per year per retiree cost reported by retiree organizations is misleading. With another five year delay, a permanent delay is very likely and that would cost a typical retired couple \$6,000 over their expected life span. Congressman Greenwood promised to consider co-sponsoring HR 13. On March 7, Max Schwartz received a letter from Congressman Greenwood promising to co-sponsor HR 13 and support the principle of equity for federal retirees.

What You Can Do: All of us must continue to pressure our Congressmen and Senators to support HR 13 in the House and Concurrent Resolution 7 in the Senate. A toll free number has been established at a "Congressional Switchboard" where we can talk to the office of any Congressman or Senator. The number is (800) 522-6721. If your Congressman is Greenwood, call his office, write, or E-mail (Worldwide Web Site <http://www.house.gov/greenwood>) him and give him your thanks for co-sponsoring HR 13. If your Congressman is Jon Fox, contact him and insist that he co-sponsor HR 13. All of us must also contact Senators Specter and Santorum and insist that they co-sponsor Senate Resolution 7.

Blue Dogs Attack: There is a coalition of 21 self-described conservative and moderate House Democrats, known as the "Blue Dogs", who have conjured up a budget plan that contains several features detrimental to all retirees. The Blue Dog plan would 1) reduce the CPI by 0.8% pending changes by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2) provide for a flat COLA, that is, a COLA based on the average benefit for each retirement program rather than the actual annuity, and 3) means-test the Medicare Part B premium, phasing in higher premiums beginning at \$50,000 for individuals and \$75,000 for couples. Individuals with \$100,000 income and couples with \$125,000 would pay the entire Part B premium. (*Of course, if deficit problems persist, these levels could easily be brought down to gain the desired reductions in cost*). The saving grace for fearful federal workers is that the plan stands little chance of becoming law. That's partly because it is complicated but mainly because it touches politically untouchable Social Security benefits that go to one in every seven Americans.

The Pennsylvania Information Superhighway or the Pennsylvania NET: At the March Chapter meeting, during discussions related to the NET, it became apparent that we should describe what the NET is and why we need it. In this newsletter we will describe what it is; in the next, why it is needed.

Let's start with the computer. For one computer to *talk* to another, each computer needs a modem. This is a piece of equipment, costing over \$100, that is added to the computer. The modem takes the computer information, which is in digital form, and makes it ready for transmission over telephone lines. We can use the computer to dial the telephone number we want to reach. The receiving computer must be activated, that is, *on-line* to receive the call. Obviously, this presents a problem. This problem is solved by means of a *Server*.

This is a company who will store your mail, referred to as *Electronic Mail* or *E-Mail* intended for another computer, and release the mail to that other computer when it says it is ready. There is a Server (Juneau) who will perform this service without cost to you, but Juneau will sneak in a little advertisement for paying advertisers. There are other Servers who charge as little as \$4.75 per month. One big advantage of E-Mail is that you can send out information to a host of addressees with a single transmission and without a specific transmission cost.

Most Servers will use the connection to your computer to connect you to WEB sites around the world. Because E-Mail is delivered at the speed of light, regular post office mail has become known as *Snail Mail*.

The existence of a computer in this configuration has many advantages. Addresses can be stored so that no future addressing is necessary. One message can be sent to any addressee with a single click of a button. Letters can be easily stored or retransmitted by a click of a button. The retransmission includes reaching those who do not have E-Mail but do have FAX capabilities.

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