

NSO Contact

National Staff Organization

January 2010

Welcome to the 2010 Winter Advocacy Retreat in Sarasota, Florida!

Changes to NEA Pension Plan impacts all affiliates

While only several state affiliates are a part of NEA's Pension Benefits Plan, what happens with that plan may create a ripple effect with all state affiliate plans across the country.

The passage of revisions to the Pension Protection Act (PPA) last year created funding issues for employers who are looking at higher pension obligations. In response, the NEA Retirement Board voted to increase the contribution rate for participating states to 10 percent. Small states in the NEA plan have difficulty absorbing that cost.

Any state affiliate preparing for or currently in bargaining is facing the fallout from those events—pension benefits and retirement are front-burner issues for negotiations.

Currently, there are three requests by plan participants to withdraw from the NEA Pension Benefits Plan. For groups without the financial ability to make the significant contribution to the plan, their only alternative is to withdraw. Some states not in the plan are looking at making cuts to their plan—both options that will have serious implications for all state affiliates.

According to Pat Chavez, newly-elected chair of the NEA Retirement Board, it's time to investigate what options state affiliates have.

"There's been discussion of an option to freeze benefits. State affiliates in the NEA plan would be able to bargain benefits rather than just withdraw from the plan," said Chavez.

NSO would have a part in this option by providing necessary benefit bargaining training and support to the affiliates.

Chavez cautioned, "We need to be looking at other temporary methods to cut costs that won't permanently erode pensions."

NSO President Chuck Agerstrand echoes Chavez's warning that all state affiliates need to be working together and avoid "a divide and conquer" strategy being used by some management.

"Every affiliate will be affected by what happens in the NEA Pension Plan. Everyone has to be on the same page on this issue. This is going to be a tough job," warned Agerstrand.



2010 Retreat agenda prepares advocates to face today's tough issues

The 2010 Winter Advocacy Retreat program kicks off on Thursday, Jan. 14 with early registration beginning at 1:00. More than 350 NSO members are expected to attend sessions. A third of those registered are first-time attendees who will be recognized at a reception later in the afternoon.

The Retreat officially begins with a General Session at 8 a.m. on Friday. NSO President Chuck Agerstrand will give participants a view of the national landscape of issues and concerns facing NSO and all unions.

In addition to the traditional sessions on arbitration, contract interpretation and grievance processing, there are new sessions on assertiveness for union advocates, blogging and creating collaboration.

Between the 100-level a.m. sessions and 200-level p.m. sessions, participants are invited to attend an Emerging Issues discussion session to be held during the lunch break beginning at 11:30 a.m. There will be updates on pension and retirement developments and state affiliate issues.

Friday will end with NSO's Solidarity Reception at 4:30 p.m.

Three and 400-level sessions are scheduled for Saturday.

NSO chooses two for Harvard Trade Union Program

Denise Hamilton, an associate staff member from New Jersey, and Denise Kay Jennex, a professional staff member from California, were chosen to participate in the 99th. session of the Harvard Trade Union Program (HTUP). They are currently at Harvard University beginning their studies and will be there until Feb. 19.

The HTUP is an intensive six-week program designed for union leaders. Through seminars, participants develop essential skills for the management and leadership of unions. The seminars are developed by Harvard faculty and provide opportunities for candidates to explore key issues in the labor movement and discuss new developments with innovative practitioners and analysts in the field.

NSO's recruitment processes for participants runs from July to Nov. Applicants are judged on their commitment to union principles and developing strength and solidarity in their local and national unions. Both Hamilton and Jennex met those qualifications by having held various positions in their local affiliates.

NSO provides full and partial scholarships for the candidates chosen for HTUP.

CBC provides bargaining support in "fiscal emergencies"

The landscape for bargaining across state affiliates is looking more and more familiar at bargaining tables. Management is looking for salary freezes, rollbacks in benefits and pensions and claiming that they are in the midst of a financial crisis. And it doesn't matter if it's bargaining season or not.

NSO has an established policy through its Coordinated Bargaining Committee (CBC) that provides guidelines for navigating such fiscal emergencies. The process begins with written notification to the NSO President and CBC Co-Chairs as soon as concessions are brought to an affiliate. NSO has also established goals and standards by which contracts are measured.

CBC Co-Chairs Robert Blackwell and Butch Santicola, along with their committee, recommend some basic principles for tough bargaining:

- Know your state and affiliate budgets.
- Manage your expectations.
- Make communication with your members a priority.
- Keep NSO and your CBC informed.

A Spring CBC meeting is scheduled for March 13 in Indianapolis.

Legislative Update

Union membership, pension plans and health care reform remain on national legislative agenda

Three key pieces of legislation will have an impact on NSO members if they are voted out of committee or are passed by Congress.

The Employee Free Choice Act (HB 1409) has been languishing in the Committee on Education and Labor. The Act is intended to amend the National Labor Relations Act, allowing employees to form, join or assist labor organizations.

The last action taken on the bill was in July when a co-sponsor signed on. No hearings are scheduled. It's expected the bill will stay in committee until there are enough votes to pass it.

Changes to the Pension Protection Act (HB 3936) show more promise. The Pomeroy-Tiberi amendment would give more time to pension groups to fund their benefit obligation without penalty. Given the current economic situation, this is a boon for employers. While the bill sits in the Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions, co-sponsors have signed on as recently as this past December. NSO supports this legislation and lobbying efforts are still needed.

For the list of Committee members and how to contact them, [click here](#).

The last piece of legislation centered on the ongoing health care debate will impact NSO members and the members we represent in our state affiliates. A proposed tax on health care benefits being hammered out by the Senate and House will make more people eligible for healthcare—but at a cost. The Senate version contains the devastating excise tax that will impact working families at a time when they're struggling financially.

The language in the legislation calls for a tax on "high cash plans." Those plans are ones costing \$8500 for individuals and \$23,000 for families. It also taxes dental and vision plans and contributions to flexible health plans. This is a direct hit on the working class.

The AFL-CIO hosted a National Call-in Blitz for health care reform on Jan. 13, but every day is a call to action to demand that health care reform works for working families.

Call toll free (1-877-323-5246) with the message that taxing health care is not the way to finance health care reform.

NSO 40th anniversary plans underway

The 2010 RA will be the date to celebrate 40 years of NSO's charge "to lead, to promote, to secure and defend." The RA is scheduled for June 11-12 in San Antonio.

In addition to a reception and dinner on June 11, NSO will be hosting a silent auction and raffling off a quilt highlighting each state affiliate. Proceeds from all sales will go the Disaster Relief Fund.

State affiliates will be responsible for their quilt squares, an auction prize and making dinner reservations for their affiliate attendees.

Lynn Adler, Vice President for Program; Mary Henson, NSO Secretary; Kathy Hill, Region 5 Director; Butch Santicola, Region 2 Director; Cheryl Singleton, Region 1 Director; Vera Stafford, NSO Comptroller; and John Stephens, Region 4 Director are on the Planning Committee.

Common interests make for interesting coalitions

Sometimes the last people you expect to share your interests turn out to be your allies. That may be the result of a recent meeting of NSO officers and UniServ managers from the UniServ Managers Association (UMA).

The meeting showed that both organizations are concerned about such issues as training opportunities for our NSO members and the crop of newly-hired employees and managers who don't come from education or union backgrounds. UMA values the kind of training NSO provides for its members and would like to see us have more involvement with NEA's Affiliate Learning Effectiveness group which provides skills and organizing training for staff.

"Both of us feel that the needs of new hires are not being met since attendance for them is no longer required at CORE," said NSO President Chuck Agerstrand. "NSO is no longer being involved in planning the Organizing Institute and I think it's impacting the success of that program."

A symptom of people coming into UniServ and manager positions without a background in education or unions may be the reason for a growing number of organizational issues state affiliates are currently dealing with.

Agerstrand commented, "Maybe we're looking at the need for more mentoring. Becoming a part of this culture involves a learning curve and some need more help in dealing with that than others."

NEA is now feeling the same financial pressures that have already affected state affiliates. Membership losses trigger revenue decreases and both impact staff positions. NEA's upcoming national summit with Executive Directors will be discussing downsizing.

How fewer positions will impact NEA's internal operations will be another area of concern for NSO members.

NSO Calendar

2010

Jan. 14 - Leadership Academy; Sarasota, FL

Jan. 15-16 - Winter Advocacy Retreat; Sarasota, FL

March 24-28 - NSO Executive Committee

June 11-12 - Representative Assembly; San Antonio, TX

NSO 40th Anniversary Celebration

National Staff Organization

The world's largest union of union staff—that's what the National Staff Organization has become. Through the efforts of literally hundreds of staff leaders, NSO has grown from a mere 35 members in a handful of states in 1969, to 5,013 (as of August, 2008) from 89 affiliates in 50 states and the District of Columbia. A major portion of that growth came with the decision by the 1978 NSO Representative Assembly to organize associate staff members.

Today, NSO has over 2,300 full-time and over 106 part-time associate staff members.

Check out the Web site,
www.nationalstaff.org

NSO Executive Committee

President – Chuck Agerstrand

Vice President for Defense – Marius Ambrose

Vice President for Program – Lynn Adler

Treasurer – Ron Goldenstein

Secretary – Mary Henson

Region 1 – Cheryl Singleton

Region 2 – Butch Santicola

Region 3 – Emmitt Jimmar

Region 4 – John Stephens

Region 5 – Kathy Hill

Region 6 – Michael Coleman

Region 7 – Catherine Alexander

At Large-A – Robert Blackwell

At Large-B – Patrick Chavez

Comptroller—Vera Stafford

Communications – Rosemary Carey

Web – Miriam Garcia