

NSO Contact

National Staff Organization

2016 NSO RA - Edition 2

Agerstrand welcomes delegates to their national union for the last time

The gavel that signaled the start of the 2016 NSO RA also signaled the end of an era. After almost 40 years of service to NSO, President Chuck Agerstrand is retiring.

“After 18 years as president, this is my last RA and it’s been a rewarding, challenging and exhausting experience. I leave with no regrets, but I will miss the people who share the same passion for this organization,” Agerstrand said.

He began his connection to NSO in 1977 when he was elected to the Executive Committee. There were just a few hundred NSO members when the organization began. Agerstrand remarked, “We were small in size, but grew because we believed in the organization and its advocacy programs.” Today, NSO is the world’s largest independent union representing 4,000 staff members across the country.

Agerstrand told the delegates, “I didn’t get here by myself. I’ve learned so much from all of you and admire the solidarity which permeates our ranks.”

He then listed the many ways members—an all-volunteer army—have made NSO a successful organization. “We’ve created the CBCs, the Winter Advocacy Retreat, a \$5 million strike fund, an exceptional defense program, an organizing and training program, pension resources—and the list goes on. We make a difference in so many lives.”

Looking to the future, Agerstrand voiced confidence that new leadership will carry on NSO’s tradition of advocacy and solidarity. He reminded delegates that “United we bargain; divided we beg, and we never want to find ourselves in that position.”



He closed his President's Report to the RA with this charge to the delegates. "Let's not forget to advocate, organize, educate, encourage participation. Remember that NSO pioneered advocacy and organizing as its founding concepts!"

Stalled NEA Pension Plan MOU bargaining prompts call to action

NSO President Chuck Agerstrand explained to members of the NEA Pension Plan that delayed meetings and bad faith bargaining on the part of NEA meant no agreement on extending the NEA Pension Plan MOU was reached by a self-imposed May 27 deadline.

As a result, NSO President Chuck Agerstrand issued a call to action on the part of plan participants.

"We're asking affected affiliates to contact their managers and finance people and explain to them that the solution to the problem is enhancing a Plan funding level that provides long-term financial security and would avoid future rate spikes. We've provided an easy solution to secure benefits into the future. Failing to act creates a serious problem with severe implications."

RA delegates from the 15 states participating in the NEA Pension Plan were updated in a special session on the progress of bargaining over the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which guaranteed funding levels until 2021. The MOU states, "The NEA will fully fund in a timeframe not to exceed 14 years."

NSO, along with AFSE and NEASO, have been bargaining a new agreement that continues NEA's commitment to fully fund the NEA Pension Plan. The new agreement would assure the promise of a secure retirement into the future. There has also been discussion on what happens when the MOU requires employers to increase their contributions to the Plan beginning next year.

NEA, NSO, AFSE and NEASO share some basic concerns. There is no funding obligation after 2022. And since 2008, contribution rates have been impacted by market losses on investments and changes in mortality rates.

All parties agreed to recommend a 2017 rate to the Pension Board that would reduce a rate hike driven by the MOU. That could be accomplished with a new MOU that includes a long-term funding policy. The new rate would represent a level of funding above the IRS rate.

CBC meeting will focus on organizing and bargaining

The National and Regional CBC meeting will be held Nov. 11-12 at the Tropicana Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas with a focus on engaging new members in the fundamentals of organizing and its relation to bargaining.

Regional CBCs will meet on Friday, Nov. 11. Along with providing updates, regions will identify issues critical in their upcoming bargaining.

Saturday, Nov. 12 will feature a keynote speaker detailing some of the threats affiliates are facing. Then, participants will be attending sessions covering defensive and offensive strategies for bargaining and how to organize around bargaining issues.

The National CBC will end by 4:15 p.m. on Saturday. Participants will be reimbursed for Thursday and Friday night stays if they attend both days of the meeting.

Making a place for themselves at the table

When there are budget cuts, they're usually the first to feel them. For some of them, technology has put them out of a job instead of making their work easier. They are professionals, but often aren't given the respect they've earned and deserve.

They are our associate staff members and those are just some of the take-aways from their Associate Staff Forum on Thursday afternoon. The Forum gives NSO's associate staff members a platform for expressing concerns, discussing issues and looking for solutions. The first Forum was held at the Winter Advocacy Retreat in January and will become a regular feature at NSO events.

“Our goal is to make sure associate staff have a place and a voice at the table—not just in NSO, but also in their own affiliates. They are professionals and need to be treated as such,” said Region 6 Director Dawn Basurto, who along with Region 2 Director Cheryl Singleton, who are the designers of the session.



Participants controlled the discussion by sharing their stories and offering advice.

Denise from Iowa said, “When my office closed, I moved to an office that is 100 miles from home. I leave on Monday morning and come home on Thursday night. I love my job and I don't want to be pushed out the door before I'm ready.”

Natasha from Ohio had a similar story. “We are losing positions by attrition. Associate staff are being assigned three, four and five professional staff members. Involuntary transfers are common. I drive an hour and 15 minutes to get to work to keep a job.”

There’s a different tone in New Jersey after Basurto and Singleton took the Forum to members there. Denise Hamilton said, “We’ve created a framework for a mentoring program as a result of the training. There are more professional development opportunities; and we attend sessions at Summer Leadership. Our members are looking what they do as a career—not just a job—and they want to grow in their profession.”

The Forum isn’t a gripe session, but a time to share ideas to help associate staff stay relevant; it’s a time to offer advice and solutions.

Wanda Turner from California said, “We can’t continue to violate our contracts and work through our breaks or stay late or take work home and expect gratitude. As long as we accommodate management, they will take advantage. We have to stand up for ourselves.”

Basurto offered the final—and perhaps the most powerful suggestion. “We need to make ourselves visible and organize against efforts by others to keep us away from the table. It’s about building relationships with others who can work with us—not against us.”

Wanda Turner from California said, “When you work through your breaks or take work home—as long as you accommodate them, management will take advantage.”