



CHAPTER 236 SOUTH PUGET SOUND

CHAPTER MEETING DATE AT 12 NOON VIA ZOOM

20 February
21 May
16 July
15 October

Chapter website: [narfewardistiv.org/Olympia-chapter 236](http://narfewardistiv.org/Olympia-chapter-236).

The ZOOM link will be sent out via email shortly before 20 February.

President's Message

Welcome to 2024! I hope you all had a happy holiday and now feel invigorated and refreshed to face this new year with a feeling of purpose and excitement.

NARFE continues to encounter many challenges to its existence with a steadily declining membership base. This is due to several factors, but principally, and as a practical matter, a lot of us are slowly ageing out absent an energetic program to recruit new members. We need to continue to emphasize that NARFE is not a union but an advocacy organization dedicated to fighting for and preserving the benefits federal employees have worked hard to achieve. No other organization works harder than NARFE to convey the message to Congress that our benefits need to be protected as much as humanly possible.

We must continue to search for ways to attract and recruit new members, whether active or retired employees, to keep our chapter alive and an effective advocate. This task is more daunting by observing all the winds of divisive change in the Congress, as well as the interesting turbulence in this year's presidential campaign. It is conceivable our status and benefits could be under severe attack with the continued efforts to reduce Federal spending and depending on the results of the 2024 presidential election. It is interesting to note the discretionary spending in the budget is far less than the entitlement spending on social security, military and civilian pensions, Medicare, Medicaid, workers injury compensation, disability etc. The largest area of discretionary spending is Defense and with the world as it is there is no push to reduce that by anyone.

Your chapter's staff and the Washington State Federation continue to monitor these trends and report time developments as they occur. You should read your NARFE magazine. It is a good source of timely information and accurate and effective reporting and analysis from NARFE Legislative Department. NARFE sends out a Daily News Clip via email covering issues of interest to Feds. You can log on to the website at narfe.org and sign up for this service.

A special meeting was held on December 5, 2023, to amend Chapter 236 bylaws. The revised bylaws were reviewed and approved by NARFE national on 30 January. A copy can be downloaded from the district website at <https://narfewadistiv.org/olympia-chapter-0236> (scroll down to below the newsletters).

Membership

Our chapter membership is 157. For the period from 1 November 23 to 31 January 24, 5 members renewed. We gained 4 new members, Brenda B [REDACTED] of Lakewood, John C [REDACTED] of Dupont, Steven O [REDACTED] of Buckley and Catherine R [REDACTED] of Olympia. A hearty welcome to our new NARFE members. One former member Barbara S [REDACTED] of Eatonville was reinstated. Two members were dropped for non-renewal. Three members were reported as having passed away, Davia L. M [REDACTED] of Odessa, George S [REDACTED] of Shelton, and Donald W [REDACTED] of Aberdeen. Our condolences to their families. Thirty-Seven prospective members were reported to us by HQ NARFE. A letter and application were sent to each.

Our chapter member numbers are holding steady but not growing. If you have the opportunity, promoting NARFE membership to an eligible friend or acquaintance is a desirable something to do. NARFE performs a vital role in advocating before Congress our interests as retirees and active federal workers. So, if you know someone who works or worked for the Feds, use your persuasive powers on them to join NARFE. Give them a NARFE magazine and show them the application for membership.

COLA UPDATE

The December CPI-W index value of 300.728 is a 0.16 decrease from the November number of 301.224. The third quarter average in 2023 was 301.236. The December value is 0.17 lower. It appears the Federal Reserve Board's plan to bring the inflation rate down to 2% and maintain full employment is working at least for now. The Federal Reserve announced 31 Jan a continuation of the current rates. This is good news for savers and not so good for borrowers.

IRS to Launch Direct File Pilot

The IRS is getting ready to debut its new Direct File Pilot. The test program will be limited to people with certain simple tax return situations in 12 states including Washington. At first the pilot will be invite-only before a more phased launch over time. Once the Direct File landing page opens, interested taxpayers can sign up to be notified when the pilot is more widely available. The filing tool is mobile-friendly, available on smartphones, tablets, and desktop computers and in English and Spanish with a toggle option for language on every page. The tool works in a step-by-step interview format that only shows questions that are relevant to the taxpayer. Using understandable language in the pilot was a priority for those using the tool and it will show the math behind its calculations along the way. So perhaps one or more of our members may be invited to participate in this test run. The private tax preparer companies are not happy with the possibility of a future free IRS filing for individuals. Source Government News January 26, 2024

While on the subject of taxes, if you are in need of assistance in filing the website of the AARP Tax Foundation offers lists of the places and addresses of free tax assistance by city or county. These locations will give the days and hours they are open. The Tax-Aide site at the Lacey Senior Center is open Tuesdays and Thursday from 12:00 to 4:00pm from late January to mid-April is one example.

Treasurers' Report

The December 31 balance is \$15,015.89.

Alzheimer's

Forms to make contributions to Alzheimer's research are in every NARFE Magazine. Be sure you write our chapter number 236 on the memo line of your check and on the donation form.

Legislative

Key congressional negotiators reached an agreement on funding for fiscal 2024 spending bills. The deal was reached after weeks of negotiations between Senator Patty Murray of Washington and Representative Kay Granger of Texas who respectively chair the Senate and House Appropriations Committees. The agreement establishes how much money will be allocated to each of the 12 bills Congress must pass each year to fund the government. With those these allocations set, lawmakers can complete the work of setting line-by-line funding for every program and office in the government agencies. However, there were loud complaints from some members of the House majority party as to why they were not included in these negotiations. This agreement follows a deal between the Senate Majority leader and the House Speaker on an overall spending level. The Democrats have vowed to reject any policy riders they consider "poison pills" while the House speaker said he would push for "meaningful" policy wins as part of the spending bills. So, the prospect of a major battle over what are generally referred to as social issues dear to some members' hearts, a government shutdown has not necessarily been avoided.

H.R.82/S.597, Social Security Fairness Act of 2023 had 306 cosponsors. All in our Washington delegation have cosponsored except Smith and Gluesenkamp-Perez. It was introduced and sent to the House Ways and Means Committee on 9 Jan 2023. This is the bill that would fully repeal both the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and Government Pension Offset (GPO).

H.R.866/S3194 Equal Cola Act would provide the full cost-of-living adjustment for FERS annuities, which would put them in line with CSRS retirees and Social Security beneficiaries. The House has 46 cosponsors, one of which is Derek Kilmer of the 6th District. Senator Patty Murray is a cosponsor in the Senate and the bill on 11/01/2023 was referred to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

The FTC Attacking Drug Makers' Patents

Certainly, high price drugs are an item of interest to our members. The Federal Trade Commission is challenging the validity of over 100 drug product patents focusing on patents on devices used to deliver medicines, like inhalers and auto injectors, to increase competition and potentially lower prices. The targeted patents cover devices that propel medicines for asthma and emphysema into the lungs or inject epinephrine to treat severe allergic attack. Drug makers list them in the FDA's "Orange Book" which affords the products protection from generic competition. Many medicines delivered by the devices are decades old and years off patent. But manufactures have long tweaked the delivery methods, patenting each change in ways that make the drugs more convenient to administer. Many old drugs are tweaked in so many ways that some are protected by a half dozen patents. The FTC says patent law protects active ingredients, not delivery methods. After an FTC challenge, companies have 30 days to withdraw or amend the patent or show it is valid. Some have already withdrawn their patents, but many have not. It will be up to the FTC to decide what to do next. Source Government Executive News (31 Jan 24)

Western Washington District Vice President – Bea Bull

Greeting Olympia South Puget Sound chapter members! I few announcements:

- Region IX VP Steve Roy is not running for reelection – if interested in running for this position, please contact him at stevenroy1@yahoo.com.
- None of the federation officers are running for reelection – we need to keep the federation open to preserve chapter access to outreach funding – if interested in running for president, vice president, secretary or treasurer, please contact WSF President Cray Henry at wsf.Cray.Henry@gmail.com.
- Federation officer elections will be conducted this summer; watch the federation website for updates www.narfe.org/wa/.
- The federation executive committee voted to combine Districts II and III to form the Western Washington District with me as the DVP. The chapters in this district are: 0043 Seattle; 0131 Vancouver; 0181 Bremerton; 0193 Everett; 0236 Olympia South Puget Sound; 1006 Sequim/Olympic Peninsula; 1070 Longview/Kelso; and 1966 Sno-King.
- The Region IX Symposium will be held October 24-26, 2024 at the Three Rivers Convention Center in Kennewick, Washington. For additional information about registration and reimbursement for attending, visit the federation website at www.narfe.org/wa/.
- The federation is updating its bylaws; members can review them either on the federation website at www.narfe.org/wa/ or on the Washington community on FEDHub. You can submit your comments on the community or in an email to WSF President Cray Henry at wsf.Cray.Henry@gmail.com. A special federation Zoom meeting will be held on 23 April to discuss the bylaws and vote to approve them. The Zoom link will be available either on the federation website or within the Washington FEDHub community.

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