

WRD RETIREES -- NEWSLETTER 164-S
SUPPLEMENTAL
August 2014

REMEMBERING AND REMINISCING
by: Richard A. Engberg

Recently I had a conversation with my friend Hal Langford, like me a native of Nebraska and also, like me, retired from a career with the U. S. Geological Survey (USGS) and living in Northern Virginia. Hal is a little older than me and although we both began our careers doing field work in Nebraska our time didn't overlap.

Anyhow, we were reminiscing about our early days in the field and recollecting events from those days. Hal asked if there was ever a time when I thought about changing careers and I answered that there were probably several times. He went on to tell me about a time when he was working in Nebraska that he seriously considered a career change. He was measuring the water discharge of the Calamus River near Burwell, Nebraska. It was December, it was cold, and it was snowing. He was wearing waders, standing in the middle of the river in two feet of water using a wading rod with a flow meter attached to it and a stopwatch, both tools used in measuring flow. He was facing upstream and was dodging small ice chunks floating in the river. About 100 feet upstream was a bridge. Looking up, he noticed a mallard duck fly under the bridge just a few feet above the water and straight toward him. The duck obviously didn't see him until it was about 15 feet away. When it saw him, it was as startled as he was and with some frantic wing flapping cleared his head by a few inches. Startled by the near miss and looking around at the snow and ice, Hal thought to himself, "What am I doing here? There's got to be a better way of making a living."

"What about you", he asked, and I recalled an incident that also had me considering a career change. Weeping Water Creek near Union, Nebraska, was an isolated location on a dirt road with no houses nearby. It was December, it was cold and I was there to collect water samples for chemical analysis. There was open water under the downstream of the bridge but for the most part the creek was frozen over. My first thought was how fortunate I am, I'm not going to have to put on waders, and I can collect the samples from the bridge. Then looking upstream, I noticed two stuffed gunny sacks on the ice with blood all around them. One concern all field personnel had was discovering a body and my first thought was that someone had been murdered, their body dismembered and stuffed in the sacks. I knew I had to investigate so I put on my hip boots, made my way down the bank and gingerly stepped onto the ice. Moving slowly, I had just gotten close enough to see that it was the remains of a deer obviously poached out of season, stuffed in the bags and thrown off the bridge. Just then the ice cracked and I went through, barely overtopping my waders. Climbing out soaking wet, I most certainly had second thoughts about my career choice. Oh, by the way, I did collect the samples.

Fortunately, neither Hal nor I quit our jobs and both of us went on to successful careers with USGS. But it's still great fun when us old timers get together to reminisce and laugh about memorable happenings from early in our careers. I recommend it highly. Believe me; the memories get better with every telling!

VIGNETTES POTPOURII
by: Jim Daniel
(From French – assorted little stories)
Back by popular demand (2 people)

My WRD career was 37 years long. It spanned the time when one could smoke anywhere to the time when one could smoke NOwhere. At many meetings, Phil Emery, Rod Cherry, and I would stand in the back of the room together and smoke up a storm. Toward the end of my career I would drive John Conomos up the wall by smoking in Senior Staff meetings. I started smoking at age 16 when I had my first real job. That first job was watering plants at a plant nursery. For 9 hours per day (no overtime then), I held a hose in my hand and filled bucket after bucket of shrubs and flowers with water. For this I was paid the generous sum of 75c per hour. If I stopped to take a break, the boss would get mad at me. After a while, though, I noticed that if one of my co-workers stopped for a smoke, the boss understood and didn't get mad at them. So, I started smoking,

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took frequent smoke breaks, and the boss didn't get mad at me anymore. Conomos, you can blame that boss for my smoking habit in Senior Staff meetings.

Basketball -- The recent flap with the ignorant Sterling guy brought to mind one of my little experiences at the American Airlines ticket counter.

One day Bill Russell in all of his 6ft 10in glory came up to me to purchase an award ticket. I engaged him in conversation while I processed the award. I always made the customers talk to me, regardless of celebrity. People don't realize that when they go up to an agent at the ticket counter, they are a 'captive audience' – they can't leave until the agent hands them a boarding pass. At any rate, I told him that I remembered a perfect squelch he laid on a sports writer when he was the player-coach of the Celtics. The reporter asked him if he thought there was a quota on playing blacks in the NBA. I recalled that he replied, Yes. Play 3 at home, 4 on the road, and 5 when you're behind! Bill loudly laughed that deep, throaty laugh of his and told me he had forgotten all about that interview. By that time I had finished the ticket and asked him to sign the form acknowledging receipt. He has always been known to refuse autographs so I made sure to tell him I wasn't asking for an autograph, I just needed his signature to complete the transaction. He complied and responded that he could do an autograph, too. Well, I whipped out a boarding pass copy and he proceeded to give me his autograph (I never asked folks like him for autographs and I think his is the only one I got in 7 years of checking in the rich and famous). He took a very long time to write and I began to understand why he never gave autographs. I think he is at least dyslexic and at worst can't read and write very well. So, he just refused quick autographs in order to mask his condition and accepted that many would think ill of him for refusing. I think what you see with him is what you get - a warm, friendly human being. I still have the autographed BP in a box somewhere in the garage.

Movie Star -- When I checked in Jamie Lee Curtis.

We weren't very busy at the ticket counter one morning when Jamie Lee Curtis and her young woman gofer came up to check in for a mid-day Los Angeles flight. I engaged her in conversation as I usually did and mentioned that I had graduated from Merced High School. She smiled and exclaimed that she hadn't heard anything about Merced for years. You see, her mother, Janet Leigh, was born in Merced in 1927 as Jeanette Helen Morrison. Jamie Lee's young companion was confused and had no idea what we were talking about. So, Jamie Lee patiently explained. Toward the end of the transaction, came the time when I had to see a picture ID. I always told celebrities, "Although I know who you are, I need to see a picture ID for the 'eye-in-the-sky' (surveillance cam above the counter – TSA may have been watching)." I can't remember one who balked – must have been my white hair. Jamie Lee's driver's license had her under her married name Guest. I said I thought that such was nice rather than having it in 'Curtis.' She said, 'well why wouldn't she have it that way' to which I replied 'that many celebrities we saw used only their screen names'. Some did, some didn't. Michael York's driver's license, for example, read Michael York Johnson – his real last name. Stevie Wonder had no driver's license (surprise!) and his Passport ID read Stevland Morris – his picture was sans sunglasses so I am probably one of the few who know what he looks like without them. After I delivered the boarding passes to the two ladies, Jamie Lee asked if there was a Starbucks anywhere around. She was very happy when I told her of the one next to her gate. Off they went. All-in-all it was a pleasant incident – seems like a nice lady. The whole thing was typical of why my fellow agents used to refer to me as "The Department of Obscure Information."

Puerto Rico -- When I consulted with Allen Zack on the *Caño Tiburones*.

Allen has always been one of my favorite people. An accomplished, professional caliber violinist, he worked his way through Vanderbilt playing in back-up orchestras on Country & Western recordings in Nashville studios. By a circuitous route, he became District Chief of the Caribbean District while I was District Chief of New Mexico. He frequently leaned on Jim Cook of the Southeast Region to get me down to San Juan to

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consult on the occasional ground-water/surface-water problems on which they were working. One such problem regarded the Canyon of the Sharks, *Caño Tiburones*. In 1947, the Puerto Rican government wanted to develop the rum industry (no rum is made there today). One of the places they wanted to grow sugar cane was this wetland near Arecibo (the deep space observatory prominent in the James Bond movie *Golden Eye*) and Manati. The only problem was that the site was perennially wet and cane needed some dry periods to flourish. So, they got the Corps of Engineers to install several humongous diesel pumps which they ran 24/7 to dewater the area. The effort to grow sugar cane eventually was abandoned but the pumps kept running. Then in 1982/83 the PR government had some new ideas about utilizing the site but found that the site was then always saline (the pumps were still running). WRD was asked to evaluate the salinity problem and to see what might be done to freshen it up. Allen asked for me, Cook came through, and soon Allen & I were standing next to the pumps (still running) surveying the situation. The ocean was only about 50 meters away from the pump platform. We looked at each other and just shook our heads. We went back to the Commonwealth and recommended that they turn off the pumps. Oh, no, they said, the area would flood without the pumps. We assured them it wouldn't but just in case, they could always turn them back on. Now remember, these pumps had been running 24/7 except for maintenance over a 35 YEAR timeframe. Hardly anyone alive remembered what the area looked like before the pumps started. Well, we finally convinced them, they turned off the pumps, the water began to freshen, the area didn't flood, and it just got a bit wet. All that time, all the diesel fuel, all that expense -- no more. Everyone was thrilled! Everyone, that is, except the diesel pump operators who no longer had a job. I don't know what the government actually had in mind when they came to WRD, but the Canyon of the Sharks became such a beautiful site that in 1998, it was designated a Natural Preserve and remains so today. It consists of estuarine, palustrine and lacustrine wetlands with around 200 animal species and more than 100 flora species. WRD, never a consultant of course, solved another problem.



NARFE'S

Legislative Program for the 113th Congress: 2013-2014

NARFE's Legislative Program for the 113th Congress (2013-2014) was adopted by the membership at the 32nd Biennial National Convention held August 26-30, 2012, in Sparks, NV.

NARFE's Legislative Program provides an extensive and specific enumeration of NARFE's member-endorsed legislative positions. In pursuing these, NARFE will defend the earned pay, benefits and deferred compensation of federal civilian employees and retirees. NARFE advocacy primarily focuses on the following legislative priorities:

- *Protect federal and postal retirees' existing retirement and health benefits from reductions and/or erosion.*
- *Protect current and future federal civilian employees' pay, and the retirement and health benefits of current and future federal and postal employees.*
- *Protect the viability, stability and standard of service of established federal government functions.*

The Legislative Program is ordered into three categories: (i) preserving existing benefits; (ii) enhancing existing benefits; and (iii) additional key positions.

Under the NARFE Bylaws, the National President has the authority to execute Association policy, which includes the Legislative Program. Under this authority, the National President makes the final legislative policy and strategy decisions based on guidance from the Legislative Program and counsel from the legislative director, and considers the views of the National Executive Board and leaders and members of the Association. Such counsel and views take on particular importance when, in the absence of specific guidance from the Legislative Program, the National President must use judgment on what is in the best interest of federal workers and annuitants. *The interaction between NARFE members at the chapter and federation levels and their members of Congress is critical to achieving the goals set forth in the Legislative Program.*

Legislative goals followed by a star ★ require the introduction of legislation. Positions printed in *italics* are new to the Legislative Program for the 113th Congress.

Preserving Existing Benefits

Economic Security: Federal Civil Service Annuities

- NARFE shall continue efforts in strong support of cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) for all federally administered retirement programs on a regular annual schedule, computed on the same basis and paid at the same time, regardless of age and/or income level. NARFE opposes across-the-board cuts not required in all federally administered retirement programs.
- NARFE supports, and shall continue to evaluate, a Consumer Price Index (CPI) based on the objective analyses of Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) professionals, and opposes any politically arbitrary changes in the CPI. The BLS should establish a research program to develop an accurate measure for retirees. NARFE shall work toward and support changing the CPI-W to the CPI-E as the standard for determining the COLA.★
- NARFE opposes any action that erodes the solvency of the Civil Service Retirement and Disability Fund (CSRDF) and supports providing full public disclosure of the fis-

cal stability and financial obligations of the Fund.

- *NARFE supports legislation to remove the increase in pension contributions of new federal employees, enacted in February 2012, and opposes other future reductions in federal pay, retirement or health benefits.★*

Federal Employees Pay

- NARFE supports full implementation of federal employee pay parity as reflected in the Federal Employees Pay Comparability Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-509).

Health Security: the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP)

NARFE supports protecting *the integrity and affordability* of the nation's most efficiently administered and cost-effective employer-sponsored health insurance program, the FEHBP, for federal employees and annuitants. Toward that end:

- *NARFE opposes reductions in government contributions toward FEHBP premiums.*
- NARFE will continue to participate actively in ongoing discussions with key Office of Personnel Management

(OPM) officials and staff regarding the premiums, benefits, terms, conditions and marketing of FEHBP plans. NARFE opposes increases in the enrollee co-payment for purchase of prescription drugs in FEHBP by federal annuitants who participate in Medicare;

- NARFE supports legislation that would ensure that all FEHBP enrollees receive the same level of prescription drug coverage, by plan; and
- NARFE supports retaining the carry-over provisions in current law for Flexible Spending Accounts (FSAs) to ensure that FSAs are not used in conjunction with high-deductible catastrophic health insurance to form an alternative version of a Health Savings Account.

To protect the program, NARFE opposes:

- Authorizing Health Savings Accounts, Medicare Savings Accounts, Medical Savings Accounts, “customer-driven,” “consumer-driven” or “patient-directed” plans in the FEHBP;
- Broadening participation in FEHBP, unless separate risk pools are created;
- Indexing flat payments by the U.S. government for FEHBP premiums;
- Requiring federal agencies to pre-fund the government/employer’s share of post-retirement FEHBP premiums for their current employees;
- Establishing separately rated health plans for Medicare-participating retirees and survivors; and
- Proposals that would encourage or force federal annuitants or workers into “cost-conscious” FEHBP plans, such as managed care and “customer-driven” options.

Ensuring Job Security for Federal Workers Affected by Privatization

- NARFE opposes policies on contracting out of federal jobs that put employees at a disadvantage in the competitive process.
- NARFE opposes proposals that would privatize government functions that do not ensure the continued federal service of current employees.
- NARFE specifically opposes contracting out the processing and maintenance of federal personnel records.

Providing Long-Term Care

- NARFE shall actively participate in the ongoing development of the federal long-term care insurance program, including use of the plan’s economy of scale to make premiums and underwriting requirements more reasonable than similar products sold in the private market.
- NARFE supports the guarantee of long-term care benefits for individuals presently eligible for Medicaid, adequate state and federal contributions to Medicaid to finance current and future program needs, standards of care and safety that all nursing homes must

follow in order to receive reimbursement for any patient in their care, and current Medicaid law that protects spouses of nursing home residents from becoming impoverished. NARFE opposes further limitations on, and supports easing, asset rules which prevent severely disabled persons from qualifying and receiving Medicaid long-term care benefits.

Guaranteeing Medicare for Current and Future Generations

NARFE supports:

- Protecting Medicare’s guarantee of basic health security for older Americans at affordable and predictable prices;
- Preserving the current Medicare fee-for-service program, including the ability to select the physician of your choice; and
- Ensuring that the Medicare drug program does not require beneficiaries who receive such coverage through other insurance to pay additional premiums.

NARFE opposes:

- Means-testing cost-sharing requirements;
- Increasing the Medicare eligibility age;
- Requiring home health care co-payments;
- Proposals that would give private Medicare plans an unfair competitive advantage over the current Medicare fee-for-service program and undermine the present program’s ability to share health care costs over a wide community of coverage, including the premium support demonstration program; and
- Schemes that limit the government portion or reduce its proportional share of Medicare premiums through a formula that does not accurately reflect the updated costs of providing health care to eligible beneficiaries.

Guaranteeing Social Security for Current and Future Retirees

- NARFE opposes investment of the Social Security reserves in investments other than Treasury securities.
- NARFE opposes replacing any portion of Social Security benefits with private individual accounts.
- In addition, NARFE should be guided by the following seven Social Security principles to provide:
 1. A benefit people can depend on;
 2. Financial security for the disabled, survivors and dependents (i.e. social insurance);
 3. Universal and fair coverage;
 4. Deliberate redistribution of benefits to lower income beneficiaries;
 5. Efficient administration of the program (less than 1 percent overhead costs);
 6. Benefits at no risk to the beneficiaries; and
 7. Full cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs).

Preservation of Employer-Sponsored Health Insurance

- NARFE supports enforcement of provisions in the Age Discrimination in Employment Act to ensure that, when provided, the same level of employer-sponsored health coverage be given to all retirees regardless of age.

Enhancing Existing Benefits

Making Health Care More Affordable

The Association shall actively participate in efforts by the administration and Congress to contain FEHBP costs, including the development and implementation of initiatives to rein in skyrocketing prescription drug expenses, particularly the use of the federal supply schedule by FEHBP plans to purchase prescription drugs on behalf of enrollees.

- The Association will educate its members on the effect of adding to or changing coverage, and the costs and benefits of requiring such benefit changes.
- NARFE opposes the Office of Personnel Management's decision to forgo the Medicare employer subsidy to which the FEHBP is entitled, since plans provide annuitants age 65 and older with drug coverage that is greater in value than the Medicare Part D prescription drug program, and will actively pursue the subsidy for the purpose of offsetting FEHBP premiums charged to the government/employer and all enrollees.

Ensuring Fair Social Security Benefits for Government Retirees

- NARFE supports the repeal or reform of the Social Security Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP).✪
- NARFE supports legislation that would require the Social Security Administration to report annually the amount of WEP penalty to affected individuals.✪

Additional Key Positions

Protecting the Postal Service's Continued Ability to Provide Universal Service

- NARFE supports legislation to maintain six delivery days per week by the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) nationwide.✪
- NARFE will join with other federal and postal organizations to seek legislation to keep small post offices open throughout the United States.✪
- NARFE supports legislation to relieve the U.S. Postal Service of its overly burdensome requirement to prefund over 10 years (from 2007 to 2016) its future retiree health care obligations that are estimated to accrue over the next 75 years.✪

- NARFE supports legislation to allow the Office of Personnel Management to make payments for any refund due to the USPS from the Civil Service Retirement and Disability Fund (CSRDF), on the condition that such payments would not result in the reduction of federal annuities paid to retirees and survivors.✪

Perfecting Federal Retirement

- NARFE supports legislation to provide retiring federal employees the option of electing and paying the actuarial cost of additional survivor annuity amounts in 5-percent increments, up to 75 percent of an unreduced annuity.✪
- NARFE shall advocate and support legislation that permits civilian federal employees to deposit bonuses and performance awards in any form into the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) on a tax-deferred basis.✪ NARFE supports legislation to conform the TSP regulations with Internal Revenue Service regulations on other qualified retirement savings plans.✪ NARFE supports legislation to authorize the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board to take legal action to protect the interests of TSP account holders in accordance with its fiduciary responsibilities.✪
- NARFE supports legislation on behalf of the diminishing number of Filipino federal annuitants to provide for increased and adequate compensation for services rendered to the Government of the United States.✪
- NARFE supports legislation to prevent the erosion of deferred federal annuitant retirement benefits.✪
- NARFE supports legislation that would allow the recalculation of retirement annuities for federal employees who have retired since 1994 and who worked in Hawaii, Alaska or the U.S. Territories, and who pay the contributions to the Civil Service Retirement and Disability Fund and income taxes that they would have paid had locality pay been available to them prior to their retirement.✪

Enhancing Long Term Care

- NARFE supports proposals to develop and coordinate a comprehensive long-term care policy that would include public and private initiatives that address financing, choices and quality service.
- The Association supports tax relief for the purchase of long-term care insurance, family caregiving and other long-term care expenses.✪ NARFE supports proposals that would help individuals who cannot afford long-term care insurance or have an immediate or likely need for long-term care to receive such services without impoverishing themselves.✪
- NARFE supports nursing home reform, including efforts to ensure that long-term care facilities are adequately staffed with experienced professionals in the medical disciplines of gerontology and nursing, and that such

individuals continue to receive training and are adequately compensated.✪

Improving the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP)

- NARFE will encourage the Office of Personnel Management to increase the number of health care providers who are board certified in, or have training in, geriatrics in FEHBP plans.

Providing Tax Relief for Health Care Expenses

- NARFE supports legislation to amend Section 125 of the tax code to allow federal retirees and survivors, and all other retirees, to pay:
 1. Their share of FEHBP and other employer-sponsored health insurance premiums with pre-tax annuities;✪ and
 2. Health care costs not covered by traditional health insurance and child and adult dependent care with pre-tax annuities deposited by annuitants in "Flexible Spending Accounts" (FSAs).✪

Improving Medicare

NARFE supports efforts to:

- Repeal means-testing of Medicare premiums;✪
- Reduce the penalty imposed on those who do not enroll in Medicare Part B at the time they become eligible;✪
- Enhance Medicare prescription drug coverage, including authority for the federal government to negotiate drug prices for the entire program; simplify and stabilize coverage; and provide equal coverage throughout the United States and its territories;✪ and,
- Place a greater emphasis on gerontological studies and training in medical education programs financed by Medicare.

Controlling Prescription Drug Costs

NARFE supports legislation to:

- Allow pharmacies to buy prescription drugs from pharmaceutical manufacturers for Medicare beneficiaries at the same average discount available in industrialized countries;✪
- Permit drugs made in the United States or other industrialized countries, and exported to third party industrialized countries, to be reimported, or imported, to the United States;✪
- Prevent pharmaceutical manufacturers from limiting the sale of drugs to other countries for the purpose of discouraging reimportation;✪ and
- Speed the approval of less expensive generic drugs.✪
- NARFE supports compliance with current law that directs the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to approve new drugs through evidence-based evaluation.

Providing Comprehensive Patient Protections

- NARFE supports legislation that would provide comprehensive patient protections to consumers enrolled in health plans regulated by federal and state law, and would also allow such individuals to sue their plans for wrongful denials of care.✪

Securing Universal Access to Comprehensive Health Care

- NARFE supports access to comprehensive health care for all Americans.✪

Preventing Medical Errors

- NARFE supports legislation that would create a system to monitor, analyze and prevent medical errors.✪

Establishing Tax Equity

- NARFE supports legislation to provide equitable tax treatment of government retirement benefits comparable with Social Security.✪
- NARFE supports indexing the income threshold on taxable Social Security benefits.✪

Supporting Community Services for Older Americans

- NARFE supports the reauthorization of, and adequate annual appropriations for, the Older Americans Act to ensure the continuation and enhancement of community services for senior citizens of all income levels.✪

Improving Response Plans for Older Americans

- NARFE supports the development of a coordinated federal, state and local emergency response plan for seniors in the event of public health emergencies or natural disasters.✪

District of Columbia Delegate Voting Rights

- NARFE supports legislation that would grant statehood to the District of Columbia.✪
- NARFE supports legislation and other changes necessary to extend to the delegate from the District of Columbia the same right to vote on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives as is afforded to all other members of Congress.✪



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