

Advocacy Efforts and Federation Role — Summary
Advocacy – John Hatton
Sunday, 10:05 am to 10:50 am

1. Advocacy positions and priorities

- NARFE’s advocacy positions are developed through a **member-driven process**: proposals come from chapters, federations, and individual members, are reviewed by the Advocacy Committee, and then approved by the National Executive Board (NEB).
- New positions for 2027–2028 include:
 - Allowing different TSP investment options.
 - Supporting concurrent receipt of disability compensation and military retirement pay.
 - Medicare coverage for FDA-approved Alzheimer’s blood tests.
 - Pre-tax flexible spending account contributions for federal employees.
 - Responsible use of AI in government while protecting privacy, benefits, and due process.
 - Congressional oversight of large-scale reorganizations and reductions in force.
 - Support for the Federal Retirement Fairness Act.
- NARFE removed its position supporting elimination of federal income taxes on Social Security benefits.

2. Protecting earned retirement and health benefits

- A major priority remains **opposing reductions to benefits already earned by federal employees and retirees**.
- During the budget reconciliation process, NARFE successfully opposed several proposals that would have negatively affected federal employees.
- Most notably, a proposed **voucher system for FEHB and PSHB** was removed. NARFE argued that it could have shifted substantially more health-care costs to employees and retirees.
- Other proposals that were ultimately removed or substantially changed included:
 - Reducing the value of the TSP G Fund.
 - Reducing or eliminating COLAs.
 - Changing retirement contributions and formulas for current employees.
 - Eliminating the FERS annuity supplement.
- NARFE continues to oppose efforts that change retirement rules for employees already vested in their benefits.

3. Civil Service and federal workforce

NARFE’s priorities include:

- Opposing **politicization of the federal civil service**.
- Opposing arbitrary, large-scale reductions in the federal workforce.
- Supporting **fair, market-based federal pay increases**.
- Supporting legislation such as the **Saving the Civil Service Act**.

- Challenging efforts to move career positions into categories with fewer civil-service protections.
- NARFE has pursued legal action concerning Schedule Policy/Career changes and other federal workforce policies.
- The organization has also submitted formal comments opposing policies that could make it easier to fire federal employees or weaken appeal rights.

4. Workforce reductions and government shutdowns

- NARFE reported approximately **285,000 fewer federal employees** following various workforce-reduction efforts.
- NARFE's concerns focus on whether reductions:
 - Are arbitrary.
 - Damage government operations.
 - Conflict with congressional directives.
 - Are conducted without adequate transparency.
- During government shutdowns, NARFE supported:
 - Protecting federal employees from improper furloughs or firings.
 - Ensuring federal employees receive back pay.
 - Maintaining adequate funding for federal operations.
- NARFE now supports legislation that would provide **automatic continuing resolutions**, reducing the possibility of future government shutdowns.

5. COLA and health-benefit issues

- NARFE continues to support the **Equal COLA Act**, intended to ensure federal retirees receive COLAs that better reflect inflation.
- Senate support has grown, with the number of co-sponsors increasing from 11 to 20.
- NARFE is also concerned about **privacy of federal employees' medical claims data**. It has challenged OPM efforts to collect and potentially share detailed health-care information.
- NARFE remains concerned that even pseudonymized data could potentially be reidentified or shared too broadly.

6. OPM customer service and retirement processing

- OPM customer service has been a significant concern, particularly difficulty reaching representatives by telephone.
- Changes to electronic delivery of 1099-R forms created additional problems for some retirees.
- Retirement processing has improved somewhat, including online applications and faster interim payments, but remains slow.
- The large increase in retirements combined with workforce reductions has created significant backlogs.
- Some of the biggest delays occur at **agency HR and payroll-processing levels before information even reaches OPM**.

7. How NARFE advances its advocacy

NARFE uses a coordinated approach involving:

- **Direct lobbying** of Congress.

- **Grassroots advocacy** by members.
- **“Grass-tops” advocacy** by federation and chapter leaders who have relationships with elected officials.
- **NAR-PAC** to build relationships with lawmakers.
- Media relations, press statements, and social media.
- Partnerships with allied organizations.
- Congressional caucuses and coalition efforts.
- Litigation when resources and partnerships make it possible.

The central message was that **members' local contacts with lawmakers make NARFE's national lobbying much more effective.**

8. Federation presidents' responsibilities

Federations are encouraged to:

- Serve as NARFE representatives with members of Congress and state officials.
- Build and maintain relationships with congressional offices **before an issue becomes urgent.**
- Attend town halls and congressional events.
- Invite lawmakers to chapter and federation meetings.
- Encourage members to respond to NARFE action alerts.
- Share advocacy information through newsletters, email, meetings, and social media.
- Promote NARFE's advocacy accomplishments publicly.
- Learn NARFE's legislative positions well enough to effectively represent the organization.

9. Advocacy participation and recognition

- NARFE will continue **LegCon** as a major national advocacy event, bringing members together for training and congressional visits.
- Grassroots advocacy efforts are being recognized through awards based on participation.
- The new **NARFE Ally Award** recognizes lawmakers who support NARFE priorities through actions such as co-sponsoring legislation and supporting key votes.
- NARFE wants members to take photos and publicize these advocacy activities to increase awareness of NARFE's work.

10. Key message for federations

The presentation emphasized that **advocacy is not just the job of NARFE headquarters.** Federation and chapter leaders are essential because they provide the local relationships, personal stories, constituent contacts, and grassroots pressure that strengthen NARFE's national lobbying efforts.

Bottom line: NARFE's advocacy strategy combines national lobbying, member activism, congressional relationships, media, PAC activity, coalition-building, and litigation.

Federation leaders are expected to be the organization's local advocates, build long-term congressional relationships, keep members informed, and mobilize them when legislative action is needed.