

National Retiree Legislative Network -- 2016 Conference, Feb. 8-11**Executive Summary:**

The conference provided updates on organizational status, a discussion with a house committee staffer, discussion of objectives, and discussion of processes to further those objectives, followed by visits to Capitol Hill to promote focus issues for this year.

ERS officers **David Watt** and **Dwight Rousu** joined with NRLN vice president Judy Stenberg from Issaquah for visits with legislators. Judy represents members of NRLN from Washington, Oregon, Alaska, and Hawaii, so we had a reason to meet with representatives outside of our ERS primary local area. We focused on meeting with representatives from the region who sit on committees handling health and pension issues that were the focus of this flyin for the NRLN. We joined Judy on visits to the offices of Rep. Dennis Heck (WA) Sen. Maria Cantwell (WA), Sen. Ron Wyden (OR), Sen. Patty Murray (WA), Sen. Lisa Murkowski (Alaska), Rep. Mazie Hirono (Hawaii), and Rep Suzan DelBene(WA).

Right now, there is an immediate window following our visits when responses from our members to their legislators who were visited could be important in advocating for laws or pressure on agencies to protect retirees regarding pensions and healthcare.

Some difficulties in scheduling meetings with legislator's offices resulted in having no appointments on Wednesday. Dave and Dwight took advantage of that day to join SPEEA staff who were also in DC along with other union representatives to visit offices of legislators and join with their discussions in opposition to the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP). We visited the offices of Senator Jerry Moran (Kansas), Representative Suzanne Bonamici (OR), Senator Patty Murray (WA), Representative Suzan DelBene(WA), Representative Kurt Schrader(OR), and Senator Maria Cantwell(WA).

First Day NRLN Talks:

NRLN President Bill Kadereit opened the meeting, reporting that total NRLN membership was about steady.

Attorney Michael Calabrese, Legislative Adviser, reported on the progress in the forming of the 501(C)3 foundation, *American Retirees Education Foundation (AREF)*, that works on educational issues alongside the NRLN, with the benefit that donations to the AREF are tax deductible (and perhaps be matched by Boeing in our case). AREF now exists legally.

Guest speaker Nicholas Uehlecke, a professional staff member of the House Ways and Means Committee joined us for a question and answer session, with an off-the record discussion.

Deb Morrisett and Judy Stenberg presented a tour of the process for the NRLN Legislative Affairs Committte of NRLN, and the Legislative Action Priorities Committee of NRLN and their output regarding analysis of prescription drug bills in the House.

Latest results of the "report card" NRLN generates were presented and distributed. We in the ERS delegation have serious reservations about the NRLN report card scheme. The NRLN report card is based not upon votes for bills, as are most "report cards" that we are accustomed to from other organizations, but rather is based upon whether the legislator has "signed on" to a bill as a supporter. This has the potential of spreading an impression that a legislator is opposed to a bill, when in fact they may be supportive of the bill but have not

signed on as a supporter for strategic reasons to improve the bill, or because they support a different similar bill. We recommend not using the NRLN "report card" to confront our legislators and staff. We do not want to inadvertently publicly bash legislators who support or may well support our issues. In our visits to Capitol Hill, we are often impressed with both with legislators and with highly motivated, informed, and hard-working staff members who are working every day to support the average citizen, including seniors and retirees.

The Monday afternoon meeting was followed by a social and dinner. Talking with the NRLN members from around the nation who have had their retiree benefits threatened and often severely reduced is a reminder to continue to act to prevent other companies, such as Boeing, from attacking retirees, as Boeing has been no recent friend of pensions.

Legislative meetings:

At each meeting, we gave a folder to the legislator's office, outlining the key focus NRLN issues this year. The key issues for this visit were pension plan mergers and prescription drug costs. NRLN is recommending increased scrutiny prior to allowing merger of two or more pension plans into one. Bills enabling Medicare to negotiate drug prices, and bills allowing importation of prescription drugs from Canada are before congress and NRLN is supporting them. As noted above, we met with the following legislative offices:

Rep. Denny Heck of Washington - We met with Seth Dawson and Larkin Corrigan Monday morning prior to the NRLN meeting. Seth recently took health care as one of his legislative assignments. He informed us that a CBO report claimed there would be no gain from negotiating drug prices for medicare. Further investigation is indicated.

House Ways and Means - Tuesday morning, a group of 12 NRLN attendees including the NRLN president and the legislative director met with three members of the House Ways and Means committee regarding pension mergers. The "non-regulatory" approach favored by those who oppose government regulation is to wait until harm from a merger occurs, then go to court and sue the trustees for violation of fiduciary duty. Though regulation requiring prior approval of a pension plan merger might preclude the need for a suit, along with the costs and delays of a suit, pension plan risks is somewhat speculative, which makes regulation more difficult. Future variations in longevity, investment returns, demographics in a plan, or bankruptcy of an employer are difficult to evaluate in the present and so difficult to formulate in a regulation.

Sen. Cantwell of Washington - We met with legislative assistant Nico Janssen who coordinates health issues, and also a legislative correspondent who coordinates on pension issues. TPP probable effects on drug prices were discussed. Merger of multiple pension plans within a company were discussed. Since Boeing has multiple pension funds within the company, this situation may face Boeing employees in the future, though currently they are better funded than pension plans I many other companies.

Sen. Wyden of Oregon - We met with Senior Health Advisor Matt Kazan and Kara Getz who handles pension matters. Wyden and Grassly have worked together on some of the price problems of pharmaceuticals and Matt seemed very well informed on particular cases of extreme increases in drug prices.

Sen. Murray of Washington - We met with staff member Colin Goldfinch, who is Health Policy Adviser on the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions for Senator Murray. We discussed medicare price negotiations. Price transparency on development costs and marketing costs might be a first step. A Kaiser Foundation poll was referenced that says citizens now rank drug prices as their biggest healthcare problem. So the pricing problem is known; the difficulty is in getting laws or regulations passed.

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Sen. Murkowski of Alaska - We met with Matt Bolger (pensions) and Chelsea Holt (Medicare). Matt noted that the senator had a policy of not signing on to a bill unless she planned to actively advocate for it, so not signing onto a bill as co-signer did not mean opposition to a bill.

Rep. Mazie Hirono of Hawaii – We met with Legislative Director Jeremy Horan and Benjamin Strand. Representative Hirono has signed as a sponsor on the Durbin bill, and seems sympathetic to our focus issues. As an interesting side factoid, they said very few mainland residents move to Hawaii to retire, which surprised me a bit.

Rep. Suzan DelBene of Washington - We met with legislative assistant Casey Katims. Judy fought for getting the representative to sign on as a sponsor to bills NRLN supports. With regard to drug costs and TPP, Casey indicated he would like more specific concerns. The next day, in the SPEEA meeting with Suzan, a diverse set of objections to the TPP were presented, but we should still work on communicating the drug cost concerns more effectively.

TPP meetings:

The Wednesday meetings included a morning briefing meeting with AFL-CIO delegations. A large number of reasons to oppose the TPP were included in folder packets we were given at the briefing, folders meant for leaving with legislators. The reasons include the high probability that the TPP would increase the costs of prescription drugs, which is an NRLN concern. The briefers worried that side letter agreements would be used to put window dressing on public concerns about TPP without fixing core problems in the agreement itself.

Our group was comprised of SPEEA staff persons Stan Sorscher and Chelsea Orvella, and Marcus Courtney who is AFL-CIO Senior Field Representative stationed in Seattle, as well as David and Dwight.

We met with Agriculture Legislative Assistant Judd Gardner from the office of Senator Jerry Moran of Kansas. He mentioned his expectation that TPP would increase exports of beef, wheat, corn, and soybeans, so he saw TPP as a mixed bag, though the National Farmers' Union is against TPP.

We met with Legislative Assistant Sarah Round from the office of Representative Suzanne Bonamici of Oregon and discussed the various issues, including the evidence from past agreements such as NAFTA that those agreements had similar positive claims before they were passed, but increased imports more than exports, and resulted in massive losses of jobs, and had no enforcement of the labor and environment provisions of those agreements.

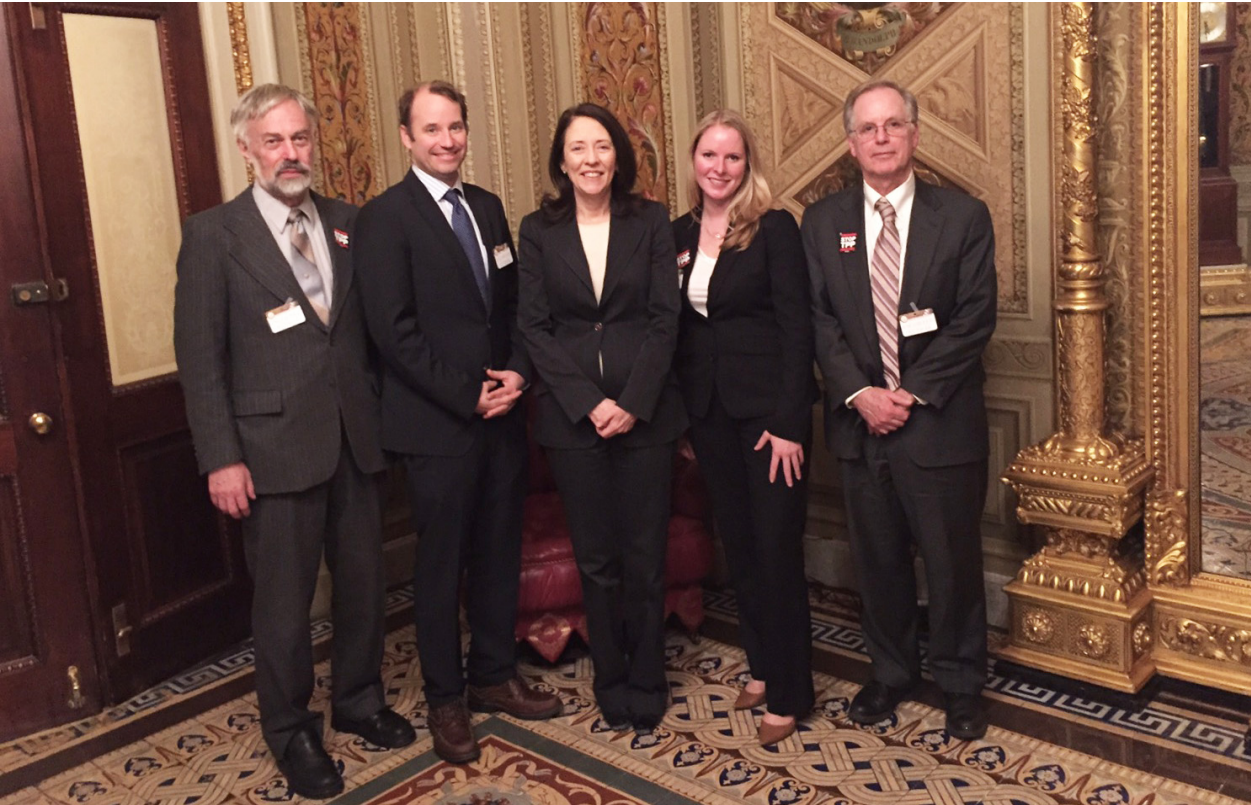
We had a meeting in person with Senator Murray. A lot of the discussion was around the problems of ISDS and the possibility of ISDS suits overpowering lawmaking ability in the United States, and the lack of strong enforcement of labor, environment, and human rights abuses.

We also met in person with Representative DelBene (WA), discussing similar issues.

Our delegation split then, as Stan Sorscher led one delegation to meet with Representative Derek Kilmer (WA) and Chelsea Orvella led the other delegation to meet with staff in the office of Representative of Kurt Schrader (OR).

For our grand finale, we went to the office of Senator Cantwell. She was voting in the Senate, so we were escorted to the President's Room just off the Senate chamber for our discussions. She was very generous with her time at the end of a long day, and we had a wide ranging discussion about the issues. Of note beyond the issues mentioned above, she was obviously concerned about the reclassification of Malaysia regarding human rights and the sex traffic business there and sex trafficking here domestically.

The photos here were taken during our meetings with Senators Murray and Cantwell.



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Dave departed late Feb. 10 for his scheduled flight home. Dwight left on the 11th.

Endnote:

Dave and Dwight hope we represented your interests as well as possible on this trip. Though it is always a bit stressful, it is a notable experience to make these trips. If you have further questions, feel free to ask either of us. We were busy trying to present the issues and listen to the legislators rather than take extensive notes, so some of the meeting descriptions above might be a bit sketchy, especially at the end of the day.

Issues:

You are invited to go to NRLN.org and read up on each of the NRLN focus issues, currently and throughout the coming year if they get updated. For accessing the full range of issues, the following links will take you there. These sources can inform your responses to action alerts, emails, local meetings, and faxes to your elected leaders.

Some of the papers are much better written than others, and vice versa. Listed below is the URL for the NRLN legislative agenda. Each topic has an executive summary on the site. The full position papers and white papers can also be found on the NRLN.org web site for greater details and references:

<http://www.nrln.org/documents/NRLN%20Legislative%20Agenda.pdf>