

Trip Report: National Retiree Legislative Network**2018 Leadership Conference, Mar 12-14****Executive Summary:**

A Monday leadership conference started the visit. NRLN president Bill Kadereit presented a view looking forward at demographics and costs, and floated some ideas on how to protect Social Security and Medicare. NRLN Executive Director Alyson Parker gave her view on current legislative events on the hill, including multi-employer pension plan rescue, prescription drug bills, and retirement savings accounts. Attorney Michael Calabrese, a NRLN strategic adviser, presented ideas on economic and legal frameworks for potential legislation on portable retirement savings accounts. Guest speaker Diane Oakley, Executive Director at the National Institute on Retirement Security, provided data and views on future demographics, and effects of changes to part time work in place of full time work, and disappearing of pension plans. She presented that current millennials have a serious shortfall in retirement savings that society should be aware of and address. Automatic enrollment in IRAs and development of state retirement savings plans may help the situation. A contingent of representatives from the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation (PBGC), led by Deputy Chief Policy Officer Michael Rae, gave their inside story of the national status of funding of single employer pension plans (good) and multi-employer pension plans (bad). One third of multi-employer pensions are underfunded.

Tuesday and Wednesday consisted of visits to Capitol Hill to promote focus issues for this year. Focus issues this year were protecting Social Security, protecting Medicare, and protecting pensions in corporate mergers.

ERS officers **David Baine** and **Dwight Rousu** conducted visits with staff members of our legislators. We focused on representatives from the greater Puget Sound area region, meeting with their particular staff who focus on committees handling issues that were the focus of this NRLN flyin. We visited the offices of Rep. Rick Larsen, Rep. Dennis Heck, Rep. Pramila Jayapal, Sen. Maria Cantwell, Rep. Suzan DelBene, and Rep. Adam Smith.

Legislative meetings:

At each meeting, we gave an NRLN folder to the legislator's office, outlining the key focus NRLN issues this visit. As noted above, we met with the following legislative offices:

Rep. Rick Larsen of Washington - Larsen sits on the Armed Services and Transportation committees. His committee assignments are not directly pertinent to our issues, but they are pertinent to the people in his district, including our retirees from Everett. We met with Legislative Assistant Katy Nazaretova. We had a good interactive discussion of the issues we were presenting.

Rep. Denny Heck of Washington - Heck sits on the financial services committee, which has some relevance to pensions and savings plans as well as insurance. We met with Legislative Assistant Erik Ashida and Legislative Correspondent Emily Kolano. Ashida has met with us before and has familiarity with some of our issues, Kolano was newer but seemed well informed on the issue that was her staff assignment.

Rep. Pramila Jayapal of Washington - Jayapal sits on the Budget and Judiciary committees. We met with Legislative Assistant Danielle Fulfs. This was the second time meeting with Fulfs, and she seemed proactively in tune with our issues.

Sen. Cantwell of Washington - Cantwell sits on the health care sub-committee of the finance committee. We met Wednesday with Legislative Assistant Nico Janssen. NRLN Northwest V.P. Judy Stenberg joined us on all our Wednesday visits. Janssen showed a firm grasp of the selected issues, and we had a good discussion and visit.

Rep. Suzan DelBene of Washington - DelBene sits on the Budget and Ways & Means committees. We met with Senior Legislative Assistant Kyle Hill. Unfortunately, we were delayed getting out of the Cantwell meeting on time and delayed 20 minutes getting through the Rayburn building security, so we were late for the meeting, but the staff arranged for a delayed meeting. Most of the meeting went fine, but our talking points on excessive prescription drug prices seemed to stall upon the staff awareness of DelBene's background in the pharmaceutical industry in Seattle. Other points were better taken.

Rep. Adam Smith of Washington - Smith sits on the Armed Services Committee. We met with Legislative Assistant Fernando Ruiz out in the hallway in Rayburn, since some pesky general and his entourage were filling up all the office space. Although out-ranked, we had a good discussion with Ruiz who demonstrated a good grasp of the issues we were presenting.

Dave and Dwight departed late Wednesday March 14 for their scheduled flights home.

Endnote:

The atmosphere in Washington DC under this congress and administration is unsettling. When forces have been trying to dismantle the whole national health care system, and some are trying to surreptitiously defund medicare, threatening to start nuclear wars, and pump adrenalin into climate change; then our pension law issues and drug cost issues seemed to pale in comparison. However, with Social Security presently being threatened and Medicare currently being threatened, and multi-employer pensions getting legislative attention this year, we seemed to get more attention from the legislative aides than last year just after the election. I have sympathy for those legislators who do care about ordinary people and justice issues when they are working in the current atmosphere with limited power to affect the path of the nation. I appreciated them giving us an ear.

Dave and Dwight hope we represented your interests as well as we could on this trip. It is always a bit stressful, but the trips into the marble halls are a notable experience. 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 are a bit sketchy, especially at the end of the day.

The recent news, after our return to Seattle, that Paul Ryan plans to leave congress after this term has some implications, since he has been a leading advocate of reducing Medicare and Social Security through policies of privatizing and using vouchers. Whether those initiatives continue in his absence is a question to watch, as well as questions about which party controls the house and senate after the 2018 elections.

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 link 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

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details and references:

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