**A TIME TO PULL TOGETHER!**

By Tony Augustine, Legislative Chair

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The White House released its 2019 budget proposal and once again, federal employees are targeted for cuts to benefits, retirement and a freeze in pay. If enacted, COLAs to retirees would be eliminated for FERS employees; the FERS special retirement supplement would be eliminated for those retiring before age 62 and your pension would be calculated using the high 5 year average salary rather than the current high 3 average of your salary. In addition, employees would be expected to shoulder more of the cost funding your FERS retirement, increasing what is taken out of your paycheck until you are paying in as much as the government (by as much as 8.75 times your current amount). Finally, you would be expected to pay more of the premium for health insurance and no pay raise was included in the budget proposal.

When each of us applied for our jobs at FSA, we were looking for good jobs with good benefits and decent pay. In a lot of communities in rural America, our jobs are some of the better jobs available but that doesn’t mean we have to allow the worth of our jobs to be reduced until they are no better than mediocre. Employees of the federal government have already made sacrifices in pay and benefits creating savings of hundreds of millions of dollars (remember the three years of pay freezes and new employees contribute much more toward their FERS pension). Yet, still we are targeted to give up more so that the savings can be spent elsewhere. How much more will we as dedicated employees be expected to sacrifice before enough is enough? If we do nothing, these proposals could easily be enacted to our detriment. Right now these are merely proposals. Both houses of Congress would have to adopt these ideas and pass legislation to implement them. It is still in the early stages of the budget process and the end result of what emerges from Congress for the 2019 Budget could be much different. That doesn’t mean we can be complacent, it merely means we have time to change the outcome. In the current political environment, there is a mindset to reduce the cost of government and many times federal employees are an easy target. Some believe we are overpaid and have too many benefits compared to the private sector. We will need to be ready to counteract this mindset. The way we all approach this will be important to the outcome for every one of us.

This year Congress is expected to write the 2018 Farm Bill and it will define the responsibilities we as FSA employees have in the future. The outcome will impact our budget and staffing for years. There will only be a limited amount of budget dollars available in the Farm Bill and there are many other groups in government jockeying for as much of it as possible. If we aren’t involved in securing our role in the Farm Bill, others will take the opportunity to seize it from us. The actions we take to secure the stability of our jobs are vital to our future. You can do your part to secure that future by giving to the NASCOE PAC.

**NASCOE PAC- “Let’s Pack the PAC”**

The Political Action Committee (PAC) continues to be an important part of our legislative process. The PAC is a resource to help get our Representative’s attention. It is also a resource in which we can help Legislators, who are friends of Agriculture and FSA, to get re-elected. Hunter Moorehead and NASCOE Leadership carefully choose which members of Congress to support in their efforts to get re-elected. These are the people that will fight for us when we get into the important issues of employee benefits, restructuring offices, and writing the next Farm Bill. We need that assistance from these Representatives when times get tough and the PAC helps us accomplish that goal. Unfortunately, money talks… and many other groups are lobbying for the same budget money we are in order to keep our jobs, so the PAC is very important to all of us. Donating to the PAC is done through a deduction from each paycheck automatically and it only takes a minute to set up. I’ve been contributing to the NASCOE PAC for years and believe me you’ll never miss it out of your paycheck! A donation of just a few dollars each pay period can make a big difference. If you have not signed up to donate to the NASCOE PAC, do it NOW! It is a vital part of our NASCOE mission. Contact me at Augie0108@aol.com to start your contribution to the NASCOE PAC today!

***In politics, if you don’t have a seat at the table, you are likely the main course!***