**Lots of Work Ahead!**

By Tony Augustine, Legislative Chair

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The White House presented their budget proposal for FY ’20, and many negative proposals in last year’s budget are again included this year. Among them are: a pay freeze; making employees pay more toward their retirement and health insurance; eliminating the early retirement supplement under FERS; eliminate the FERS retirement COLA; changing from a high 3 to a high 5 average salary to figure retirement; and reduce the G Fund interest rate. The Senate Budget Committee kept the White House benefit cuts intact, while the House of Representatives Budget Committee has not finalized their budget plans yet. So far there has not been a consensus reached between the House, Senate and White House on the overall budget figures. We will need to monitor the developments closely.

Right now the budget deficit is quite high and with the debt ceiling needing to be raised by the end of September, don’t be surprised if there is talk of making cuts in the budget. Some members of Congress want to bundle together the FY ’20 budget and debt ceiling bill, but the White House wants to keep them separate for better leverage of the President’s priorities. Only time will tell how that shakes out.

We will soon have several heavy workload activities to keep us busy in the office. With the late crop planting, acreage certification will soon dominate our time. Then we will be consumed with the new MFP payments shortly after acreage reporting ends. Mixed into that is a CRP signup/ reenrollment/ extension through August 23. Then beginning early September will bring implementation of the farm program beginning with ARC/PLC elections and then yield updates and two years of enrollment in ARC/PLC. It looks like we will be very busy for a long time. With the increased workload to accomplish all these things, it will be important to be fully staffed in our local offices. Filling vacancies in county offices seems to be taking a very long time through Business Center. Recently, FSA staffing was at 88% of being fully staffed. That means we are understaffed by 12% which is a lot. To be the most effective and provide the outstanding customer service that the Secretary wants us to achieve, we must have all the resources, including staffing, that we need and deserve. I’m certain we all are willing to give the extra effort to get the job done, but it is unfair to leave our offices short staffed in the process.

**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 through donations from the PAC. These are the people that will fight for us when we get into the important issues of FSA budget, employee benefits, restructuring offices, and funds for staffing. We need that assistance from these members of Congress when times get tough and the PAC helps us accomplish that goal, 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!