



OPEDA NEWSLETTER

Organization of Professional Employees
of the U.S. Department of Agriculture
www.opeda.net

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President's Message



I am looking forward to leading OPEDA through the next three years. I pledge to increase OPEDA membership by enhancing the value of

the organization to its members and by providing special incentives for eligible individuals to join OPEDA.

I have already taken steps to improve the web site to support our legislative agenda and to better dialog with existing members. We will keep a careful watch on the Federal Employees Health Benefit Plans while health care insurance remains a national issue and is subject to legislative modifications. With the Council and Board we will continue to support appropriate pay for our hard-working federal employees. We will participate in coalitions of federal employees with similar objectives.

The Council and the Board of Directors will work with businesses to obtain reduced rates for auto, liability, legal and other types of insurance, and donations from our corporate sponsors.

We will work to maintain and improve the visibility of OPEDA within the leadership of USDA.

Louis Iacoletti

OPEDA elects Iacoletti National President for 2009 – 2012.

Louis Iacoletti, FSA, was elected National President of OPEDA for the three year term July 1, 2009 – June 30, 2012. Since his election, Louis has

initiated a corporate sponsorship program and a campaign to attract and recruit new members. Louis encourages each OPEDA member to extend a welcoming hand to fellow USDA employees and retirees. Additionally, Louis is working with the Council and Board of Directors to develop and implement a plan to increase the value of the Organization for our members.

Seven Council Members (Regional Representatives) Elected.

New Council Members (Regional Representatives) were elected last summer and took office on July 1, 2009. They are as follows;

Region 1 – Hal Swenson, NRCS – Alaska, Arizona, California, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, New Mexico, Oregon, Nevada, Utah, Washington, Pacific Trust Territories.

Region 2 – James J. Krueger, NRCS – Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming.

Region 3 – Randy R. Edwards, NRCS – Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin.

Region 4 – Robert Purdom, NRCS – Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Texas

Region 5 – Michael Botelho, RD - Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee.

Region 6 - Kathleen Rajkowski, ARS - Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island.

Region 7 – Ed Dickerhoof, FS – Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia.

If you have suggestions or concerns, contact the Council Member in your Region.

OPEDA Makes a Presentation to the Combined Federal Campaign



On January 26, 2010, the OPEDA Council and Board continued the tradition of supporting the USDA Combined

Federal Campaign (CFC). President Louis Iacoletti and Executive Director Holly Hambley presented a check on behalf of OPEDA to Susan McCarthy, ARS, who served as the Director of the CFC for all of USDA for the 2009-2010 Campaign.

President Obama Cites USDA Office Consolidation as Cost Cutting Move

USDA plans to occupy 380,000 square feet, leased by GSA in its behalf, in a new building close to the National Mall and the Federal Center SW and L'Enfant Plaza Metro stations. At this time Economic Research Service, Food Safety and Inspection Service, Rural Development, Agricultural Research Service, Farm Service Agency and Foreign Agricultural Service employees are making plans to move into the new facility some time in 2011. President Obama cited this initiative one of his anticipated cost cutting measures in a budget trimming initiative.

OPEDA Awards Peterson and Stefani Scholarships



OPEDA has awarded two John Peterson Scholarships to Amanda Julie Myers and Shona Feistner.

The Steven "Tom" Stefani Scholarship was won by Jayne Milligan.

Myers is a freshman at Northwestern University. She is interested the work undertaken by those in the public service. She is especially interested in

environmental issues and has already taken a student leadership role in a local recycling program.

Shona Feistner is a sophomore at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. She has taken the lead in the Prevent Child Abuse America of the Girl Scouts, USA, and in the student ambassador program. She is committed to public service now and in the future.

Jayna Milligan is a senior at Tarleton State University, a part of the Texas A & M University System. She is in the College of Education with a major in Interdisciplinary Studies in the Department of Curriculum and instruction. She has been active in community service projects. She hopes to identify the needs of her students as she implements her plans to become a teacher in the public schools.

During the past few years, OPEDA has awarded several scholarships of \$500 each to students from all parts of the country. OPEDA places a high premium on education and believes that its scholarships will have a valuable give-back in the future. To reward our members for their continuing support of OPEDA, starting in 2010, scholarships will be available only to OPEDA members in good standing and their family members. Additionally, only fully completed applications will be considered. If you plan to apply for a scholarship, please ensure that you submit all documents requested in the announcement.

Office of Advocacy and Outreach Established

On November 3, 2009, the Secretary issued a three page memorandum 1064-001 establishing the Office of Advocacy and Outreach. This action was required by 7 U.S.C. 6934 as added by Section 14013 of the 2008 Farm Bill. The office has authority to oversee programs for disadvantaged farmers, farm workers and small farms and beginning farmers and ranchers.

OPM Chief John Barry Outlines Thinking on Personnel System Changes

John Barry, Chief of the Office of Personnel (OPM) has been presenting his ideas for remaking the federal personnel system in speeches to conferences and interested employee groups. These ideas included reorganization of OPM so that the

recruitment and hiring system would be modified, and the federal pay system would be overhauled and OPM would increase its effectiveness.

Barry has signed a Memo of Understanding between agency and Union Officials. The five functions in OPM will now be Employee Services, Retirement and Benefits, Merit System Audit and Compliance, Federal Investigative Services and Human Resource Solutions.

Health Care Insurance Reform a Major Issue



Legislation to change health insurance procedures and policies continues to be an item of great interest to all U.S. citizens. While the Federal Employees Health Benefit Plan(s) (FEHBP) are in place for next year, we all must be

vigilant in following developments that could affect federal employees.

The result of the recent Special Election in Massachusetts is expected to affect the content and timing of passage of a health reform bill.

The version of the bill passed by the Senate on Christmas Eve requires separation of the proposed national health insurance from FEHBP. However, the House version does not contain this language, which could result in an increase in FEHBP premiums. Accordingly, OPEDA supports the Senate version of this bill (with changes) – and not the House version.

Changes are needed to the Senate Bill which proposes a new tax on insurance carriers who offer high value health insurance plans. We note that the provision assesses a non-deductible 40-percent excise tax on total health insurance policies costing more than \$8,500 for individuals and \$23,000 for families. This total is achieved by including broad health insurance policies, dental and visual plan premiums, amounts set aside into Flexible Spending Accounts (FSAs) and employer contributions to Health Savings Accounts (HSAs). The tax would begin in 2013.

Federal workers and annuitants could be required to pay the tax in future years because health care spending is likely to exceed the Consumer Price Index (CPI) plus 1-percent indexing caps included in the Bill. The 40-percent excise would not apply to policies covering workers in collective bargaining agreements, state and local workers and members of voluntary employee benefit associations through December 31, 2017, but could apply to Federal employees and annuitants starting in 2013.

We urge OPEDA members to follow Congressional activity regarding the new 40-percent excise tax on high-ticket premiums. If this continues to be an issue, members should urge their legislators to include federal workers and annuitants in the plan to delay levying the 40 percent excise tax on health plans until 2018. Federal workers and annuitants should be afforded the same exclusions that state, local and union member will receive.

Links to offices in the House and Senate are as follows:

<https://writerep.house.gov/writerep/welcome.shtml>

www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm

Members may also contact the OPEDA office at 202-720-4898 if they need assistance contacting their elected representatives.

Remember that as U.S. citizens federal employees have the right to contact their legislators. However, they must not do this on government time, on government property or with federal resources.

OPEDA Member Spotlight on Raymond L. (Ray) Anderson

Ray Anderson joined OPEDA in 1954 when he came to work for the Economic Research Service (ERS), USDA, in Montana. After earning his doctorate at the University of Wisconsin, he was assigned to the ERS office in Ft. Collins, Colorado.

Ray works on economic problems related to water use and natural resources in agriculture. Currently he and Harvard Professor Arthur Maass are

preparing and extensive revision of their book **And the Desert Shall Rejoice**. This work will be republished in Valencia, Spain. The authors examine the economics of irrigation techniques and the problems related thereto in Spain, Colorado, Utah and California.

OPEDA congratulates Ray and his co-author on the upcoming publication of this very timely analysis of our scarce resource, fresh water.

OPEDA Holiday Party – Snowed In – or Out



We had the space – the Patio!
We had the food – the best “on offer!”
We had the program – a gift for the needy through
the Combined Federal Campaign
And –
We found a CFC representative to accept the gift
We were ready for our Holiday Party.
But---

Bobby Burns said it clearly – “The best laid plans of mice and men gang aft agley...” (often go awry) and OPEDA’s plans were thwarted by the biggest snow storm to hit the Washington, DC Region in several years. After a weekend of heavy snow, two feet of cover on all the roads in his neighborhood kept our President captive for another day. Not only outdoor Metro stations, schools and local governments were closed – the mighty U.S. federal government had a Monday off – the Monday of our party. OPEDA made all the necessary cancelations – no charges accrued for the superior comestibles we had hoped to provide.

All that is left today is memories of the snow – and a hope that a part of our destiny next year will be fulfilled as we host the 2010 Holiday Party in the Whitten Patio.

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