

## **NCSSMA Washington Representative**

### **2018 Annual Report**

#### **Rachel A. Emmons, Greystone Group**

As 2018 comes to a close, I would like to say thank you to the National Council of Social Security Management Associations (NCSSMA), and our members, for once again having the honor and the pleasure to serve as NCSSMA's Washington Representative. 2018 was a busy and productive year, and I worked closely with the Executive Committee to advance NCSSMA's objectives on a number of fronts. The following report includes highlights of some of our significant accomplishments and my contributions to those efforts and initiatives. I am looking forward to additional achievements in the coming year and appreciate the opportunity to represent NCSSMA again in 2019.

As NCSSMA's Washington Representative, I was actively involved in regular communications and consultations with the Executive Committee. I communicated on an almost daily basis with the NCSSMA President, participated in the monthly Executive Committee conference calls, served as an active advisor to the Legislative Initiatives and Grassroots Committee, participated in Past President conference calls, and provided timely Washington updates and reports as appropriate. I also contributed on an ongoing basis to review and editing of NCSSMA communications, both for distribution to the membership and outside the association.

I prepared the NCSSMA Weekly News Flashes and updated the NCSSMA SharePoint site accordingly. I also served as a member of the FrontLine Editorial Board and participated in conference calls and reviewed and edited content for the FrontLine blog.

A significant initiative was communicating information to the NCSSMA membership on important issues such as the budget and appropriations process, NCSSMA legislative proposals, and initiatives advanced by both the Government Managers Coalition (GMC) and the Federal-Postal Coalition (FPC). I provided counsel to the NCSSMA President and Executive Committee regarding the legislative process and the ever-changing, and often challenging, political environment.

I had the pleasure of attending seven Regional Management Association Annual Meetings and the NCSSMA Annual Meeting in Atlantic City, NJ. As always, I enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity to interact directly with the membership. I participated in the following regional meetings and spent time with the respective delegations:

- Dallas Region Management Association (DRMA) – Dallas, Texas
- New England Social Security Management Association (NESSMA) – Boylston, Massachusetts
- Atlanta Region Management Association (ARMA) – Mobile, Alabama
- Philadelphia Region Management Association (PRMA) – Arlington, Virginia
- Chicago Social Security Management Association (CSSMA) – Grand Rapids, Michigan
- San Francisco Region Management Association (SFRMA) – Sacramento, California
- New York Region Management Society (NYRMS) – Atlantic City, New Jersey

I continued efforts to ensure NCSSMA's strong presence on Capitol Hill by working with both the Executive Committee and the Legislative Initiatives and Grassroots Committee. The Legislative Initiatives and Grassroots Committee continued its efforts to seek innovative ways to target key Congressional appropriators regarding funding for the Social Security Administration (SSA). The committee continued the revamp of its structure and outreach activities, and I played an active and

engaged role in the committee's planning and execution of their agenda. I look forward to working with this committee and its dedicated members again this year.

As NCSSMA's Washington Representative I cultivated and maintained relationships with Members of Congress and staff of key Congressional Committees and Subcommittees including, but not limited to: House and Senate Budget Committees; House and Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittees; Senate Finance Committee; House Ways and Means Committee Subcommittees on Social Security and Human Resources; Senate Special Committee on Aging; House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform; and Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee.

I coordinated and participated in numerous meetings on Capitol Hill with Members of Congress and staff; participated in meetings with agency leadership; prepared communications, coordinated and participated in meetings with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB); and prepared communications, drafted correspondence and participated in meetings with members of the SSA advocacy community.

I attended numerous Congressional hearings on topics of interest to our membership and provided written summaries of those proceedings. I was also actively involved in preparation and submission of Congressional Statements for the Record and Outside Witness Testimony related to SSA's funding needs.

Key meetings, documents, and initiatives I contributed to included:

- NCSSMA Priority Areas of Concern document, January 2018
- NCSSMA Hiring Challenges document, January 2018
- Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 Budget Resource Needs document, updated throughout the year
- Letter to House and Senate Appropriators requesting additional FY 2018 administrative funding for SSA as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, March 2018
- NCSSMA Responses to Legislative Proposals included in the FY 2019 President's Budget Request, March 2018
- NCSSMA Capitol Hill Day, March 2018 – requested and scheduled over 60 meetings and assisted in preparation of all documents related to meetings. Unfortunately the weather did not cooperate with our plans for this trip, so I also canceled over 60 meetings! On a brighter note, we did provide all of our documents in advance to the offices and my cancellation communications included our thanks and appreciation for their assistance and understanding.
- Statement for the Record submitted to House Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee regarding FY 2019 administrative funding for SSA, April 2018
- Outside Witness Testimony submitted to Senate Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee regarding FY 2019 administrative funding for SSA, May 2018
- Capitol Hill Day, July 2018. Fortunately we did not have a repeat of the March weather event and we had a fantastic day on Capitol Hill in July. We were able to present House Subcommittee on Social Security Chairman Sam Johnson (R-TX-3) with a NCSSMA Lifetime Achievement Award for his outstanding service to the American people served by SSA. Our Executive Committee met personally with Chairman Johnson and his staff in the House Ways and Means Committee Library. It was certainly a highlight of the trip. Another highlight of the trip was meeting with Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT). Senator Sanders has been a strong advocate for funding for SSA and introduced S. 3147, the Social Security Administration Fairness Act in June 2018, which

NCSSMA supported. We had the opportunity to meet with the Senator to discuss field office and teleservice center issues and resource needs.

- Letter of support for H.R. 6084, the *Improving Social Security's Service to Victims of Identity Theft Act*, July 2018
- Prepared NCSSMA Member Lobbying Guidance document, August 2018
- Preparation for the Nomination Hearing of Andrew M. Saul to be Commissioner of the Social Security Administration, September 2018
- Meeting with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), October 2018
- Capitol Hill Visits, October 2018
- Meeting with the National Organization of Social Security Claimants' Representatives (NOSSCR), November 2018
- Meeting with the Senior Executives Associations (SEA), November 2018
- Letter to OMB regarding FY 2020 administrative funding for SSA, November 2018

I represented NCSSMA with key groups in Washington to advance and achieve NCSSMA's mission and goals:

- Social Security Advisory Board (SSAB) - I am particularly proud of our ongoing outreach efforts and communications with the SSAB. We meet with the SSAB on a regular basis. Highlights from 2018 include having our Executive Committee meet with the full Board and staff in July and SSAB Chair Kim Hildred and Staff Director Claire Green attend our NCSSMA Annual meeting as speakers and guests.
- Government Managers Coalition (GMC) – quarterly meetings and regular communications
- Federal-Postal Coalition (FPC) – monthly meetings/conference calls

I sincerely appreciate the confidence placed in me by the Executive Committee on behalf of NCSSMA and our members nationwide. It truly takes the support and assistance of the entire NCSSMA organization to advance our initiatives and achieve success on the legislative front. Because of the support and assistance of the entire NCSSMA organization and our efforts this past year I believe we played an important role in the FY 2018 and FY 2019 budget and appropriations process related to SSA. In a welcome departure to what has unfortunately become the norm, we actually saw the passage and signature into law of the FY 2019 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill BEFORE September 30. This was the first time since 1996 that the Labor-HHS-Education spending bill was completed before the start of the new fiscal year. That conference agreement also included a Continuing Resolution (CR) through December 7, 2018, for any of the spending bills that were not signed into law before the end of the fiscal year.

Jump ahead to today as I write this report and I am more thankful than ever that our spending bill was completed back in September. December 7 has come and gone, seven appropriations bills remain unresolved, and as a result we are in the midst of partial government shutdown.

Congress remains at an impasse over funding President Trump's border wall. Last Thursday, House Republicans sought to meet President Trump's requests by adding \$5 billion for border wall construction to the Senate's version of a stopgap spending measure passed on Wednesday, December 19. The House passed the CR with the additional funds by a vote of 217-185.

President Trump had indicated on Wednesday that he would sign the CR passed by the Senate even though it didn't provide funding for the border wall, and said the Administration would find alternative

sources of funding. However, as the deadline to fund the government grew closer, members of the House Freedom Caucus made a final push to fund the President's signature campaign promise before Democrats take control of the House in the next Congress and convinced the President to continue to fight for the wall rather than sign the CR passed by the Senate earlier in the week.

On Friday, the Senate held open a vote on proceeding to the CR as passed by the House for over 5 hours while negotiations continued. Ultimately, the vote passed by 48-47 with Vice President Pence breaking the tie. Following the vote, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) noted that final passage requires 60 votes, which entails Democratic support, and enactment requires a Presidential signature. Majority Leader McConnell urged Democrats to keep negotiating with the President and said that when an agreement is reached that would garner enough Democratic support and be signed by the President, the Senate will vote on the agreement.

Without the funding bill, nine federal departments and several agencies are currently shut down, comprising about 25 percent of the government. The remaining three-quarters of the government, including the Social Security Administration, Defense, and Labor and Health and Human Services departments, were already funded back in September and are not affected by the shutdown.

At the time of this report the partial government shutdown is expected to continue until after Christmas, perhaps even into 2019. Unfortunately the 2019 pay raise for federal employees also remains unresolved during the stalemate on finalizing the outstanding FY 2019 appropriations bills. President Trump has recommended no pay raise for the federal workforce on the General Schedule in 2019, which Congress can override if it wishes to do so. They have not done so as of yet. While the Senate has approved language providing a pay raise, the House has not. Depending on how the appropriations wrap up plays out, Congress may need to approve a retroactive pay raise. It remains to be seen how all of these issues will be resolved. I will continue to monitor the situation and report on developments. These recent events make it even more significant that SSA received its full FY 2019 appropriation on September 28, 2018.

Relative to the budget and appropriations front, I appreciate all of the time and effort expended on our legislative and grassroots campaigns and look forward to working on behalf of NCSSMA again this coming year. In addition to our efforts related to SSA's administrative funding, I also believe we continue to be an important voice in the discussions related to SSA's systems and information technology (IT) modernization efforts and needs. NCSSMA has expressed concerns for years regarding the state of SSA's systems and IT, and 2018 was a year where we continued to gain momentum in getting legislators and others to understand the urgency and importance of modernizing SSA's aging systems and IT. I am happy to report that, through our efforts and those of the agency, SSA received \$280 million in FY 2018 specifically directed to work toward modernizing SSA's systems. With the continued development and progress made relative to SSA's IT Modernization Plan, I have been able to play a part in NCSSMA's ongoing review and analysis of the plan and sharing our thoughts with Capitol Hill and others. We are starting to see benefits with the first round of details from field offices and other components participating in the agile development process. This will continue to be a focus for NCSSMA in the years to come.

In addition to NCSSMA's efforts on the budget front, and our ongoing role in the systems and IT discussions, it was an exciting and productive year for us with legislative accomplishments on a number of other fronts. We continued to advocate on behalf of H.R. 4182, the *EQUALS Act*, extending the current one-year probationary period. This legislation was introduced by Rep. James Comer (R-KY-1) in November 2017 and passed the House of Representatives as a stand-alone bill. NCSSMA has advocated for extending the current one-year probationary period for more than a decade, both individually and as a member of the GMC. While the bill fell short of crossing the legislative finish line in

the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress, we will continue to engage and work with our GMC colleagues and both House and Senate legislators on extension of the probationary period in general, and potential new legislation when the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress convenes next month.

In addition to the probationary period issue, NCSSMA took the lead for the GMC on support for other important legislation such as S. 1887, *the Direct Hire of Students and Recent Graduates Act of 2017*. We had reason to celebrate when this legislation was included in H.R. 5515, the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019, which was signed into law on August 13, 2018. The GMC is continuing our engagement on this provision as OPM and the Hill work through implementing this much-needed and eagerly anticipated hiring authority. Through our active participation in the GMC we will continue efforts to advance other commonsense federal workforce reform bills that result in an improved federal government that can better serve the American public.

We worked not only with the GMC, but also with the Federal-Postal Coalition (FPC) to advance legislation that positively affects not only SSA managers, but also managers throughout the entire federal government. Given the political environment throughout much of 2018, many of the initiatives through the FPC sought to oppose legislation that could adversely affect our members, and other managers throughout the federal government. FPC-led efforts that we were active in included most notably opposition of legislation to reform federal employee benefits by eliminating FERS, FEHBP, increasing employee retirement contributions and targeting the TSP to reduce rates of return. The FPC was also active throughout the year in opposing proposed federal employee pay freezes.

And finally, we also saw an incredible legislative victory in the area of SSA's Representative Payee program when H.R. 4547, the *Strengthening Protections for Social Security Beneficiaries Act of 2018*, was signed into law in April 2018. This bipartisan legislation, introduced by Chairman Sam Johnson (R-TX-3) and Ranking Member John Larson (D-CT-1) of the House Subcommittee on Social Security addressed so many of the issues and concerns we have raised over the years with the Subcommittee, SSA, SSAB and others regarding the Representative Payee program. We enthusiastically supported this legislation when it was introduced, and worked with both the House and Senate as the measure moved through legislative process. We continue to be involved as the legislation is implemented at SSA.

As always, I am anticipating the year ahead will be challenging, especially on the budget and appropriations front. As a result of the November elections, we'll be working to survey and navigate a reshaped landscape in Washington. This always requires careful analysis and planning and we will continue to both maintain existing relationships and cultivate new ones. I plan to work closely with the Executive Committee, Members of Congress and staff, the SSA advocacy community, and agency leadership to secure adequate funding for SSA. I also plan to work closely with our colleagues in the Government Managers Coalition to seek out opportunities to advance relevant legislation and good government initiatives. And finally, I'm looking forward to working closely with NCSSMA leaders to advance the resolutions passed at the 2018 Annual Meeting.

I would like to close this report with my sincere thanks for the opportunity to represent NCSSMA and its membership this past year. I am looking forward to our continued successes in 2019 and beyond.

December 26, 2018