

## **NFFE Forest Service Council 2018 Legislative Conference**

Over the week of May 6<sup>th</sup> twelve members of the NFFE Forest Service Council Legislative Committee met in Washington DC to visit with our Senators, Representatives and their staff. The purpose of this yearly visit is to inform our elected officials on issues important to our bargaining unit employees. Your legislative team made over 80 congressional visits this year.

The primary issues your legislative committee brought to Congress's attention this year was the continuing effort to promote and build support for S-29 and HR-3303 and to prevent the dismantling of the CCC program within the Forest Service.

Senate Bill-29 and House Resolution-3303 are respectively the FAIR Retire Act and the First Responders FAIR Retire Act. Federal employee retirement is administered by the Office of Personnel Management. Our Nations 1<sup>st</sup> responders are under a retirement program commonly known as 6(c), this allows firefighters, law enforcement officers and others who have hazardous duty positions to retire after 20 of service at 50 years of age. However, under current rules and regulations if one of our 1<sup>st</sup> responders is injured and disabled in the line of duty and can no longer perform in a hazardous duty position or other position covered by 6(c) they can be placed in a non-covered position and lose their 20 year retirement and be placed in a 30 year retirement program. Those employees covered by 6(c) contribute additional monies each pay period to fund their 20 year retirement. If injured in the line of duty and moved to a non-covered position these employees not only lose their 20 year retirement and now have to work 30 years but they also lose the additional monies they contributed to fund their 6(c) retirement.

S-29 and HR-3303 would correct this injustice by allowing injured and disabled 1<sup>st</sup> responders to remain under 6(c) coverage if placed in a non-covered position after returning to work from an on the job injury.

This is the third year that the NFFE FS Council Legislative team has been working on this issue. Year one we found our bill sponsors, Senator Jon Tester (D-MT) and Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) who wrote and introduced S-29 in the Senate. The second year we found co-sponsors Rep Connolly (D-VA) and Rep King (R-NY) for the companion bill, HR-3303 in the House of Representatives. This year your legislative team continued to build support for the bill and hope to get it passed and signed into law. The bill has been well received, has bi-partisan support and is seen as common sense legislation.

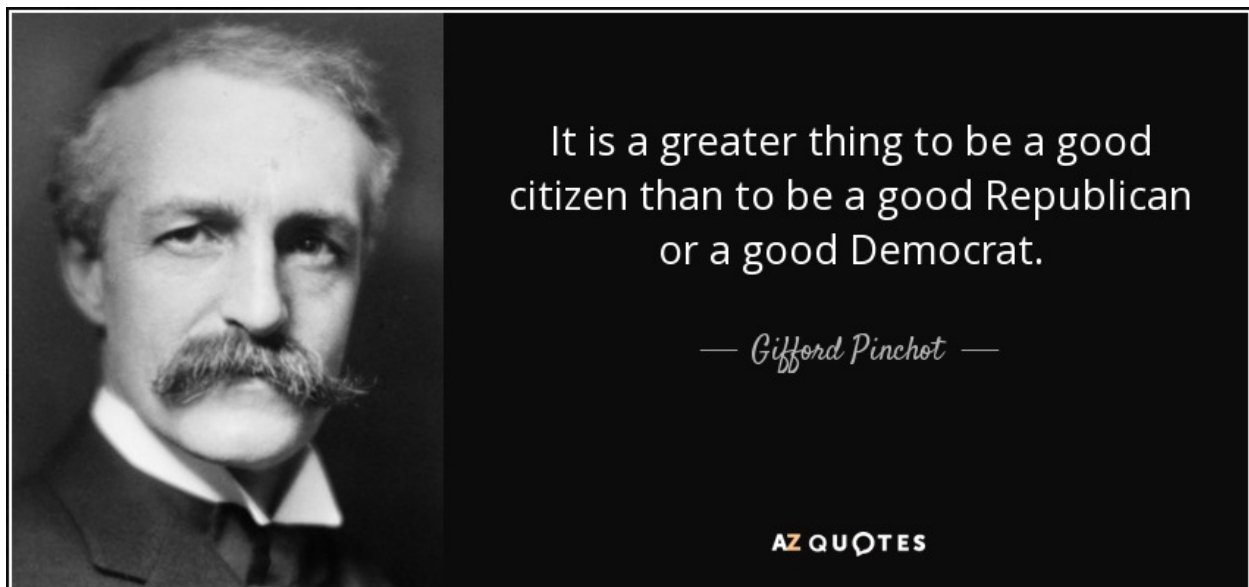
The other issue presented on Capitol Hill by your legislative team was inform Congress the importance of the CCC / Job Corp program within the Forest Service. The presidents proposed budget calls for the elimination of the CCC centers administered by the Forest Service in favor of contracting. Congressionals and their staffs were informed about the benefits of keeping these CCC centers in the Forest Service as a matter of efficiency, cost effectiveness, services provided to the communities in which they are located and helping meet the Forest Service mission. This issue was also well received by the congressionals and their staff who noted that the president doesn't get everything he wants in the final budget.

On a personal note it is my feeling that our yearly visits to Capitol Hill serve as a breath of fresh air to our Senators, Representatives and their staff. When the Forest Service Council Legislative team arrives to meet our elected officials, we are there as citizens presenting issues for the greatest good of our bargaining unit members.

The first Chief of the Forest Service, Gifford Pinchot said our mission was to do, “The greatest good for the greatest number of people for the longest time”. That quote, made over 100 years ago was in reference to conservation, but the key message remains the same. We are tasked to do, “The greatest good for the greatest number of people”.

Money has always played a role in politics, but today special interests and their financial contributions are having a greater and greater impact on our political system than ever before. The divisiveness and partisanship of those special interests has made the true citizen lobbyist a rarity on Capitol Hill. We, as Union members, are called upon to act in that greatest good for the issues brought forth upon us by our members. Those issues which we present to our elected officials are non-partisan and should serve as a reminder that they were elected to a National office to serve all America.

One final quote from our first Chief.



Bob Beckley

NFFE National VP

NFFE Local 60 VP