

NSO Contact

National Staff Organization

2010 Winter Advocacy Retreat

Agerstrand's welcome

“This is our time!”

Despite the attacks by our critics—despite the uncertain economic times—despite the constant challenges—we can out organize, out advocate and out strategize anything in our path.

Those words of Chuck Agerstrand, NSO President, served as an energizing start to the 2010 Winter Advocacy Retreat.

Harking back to NSO's 1970 beginning, Agerstrand reminded us of our original charge—to guarantee due process for our members.

But we've come a long way from that simple, guiding principle. Our current Constitution and Bylaws are testimony to that.

Today we focus on what kind of advocacy, programs, training and resources we need to face our future—one that brings us funding issues, union attacks, and legislation counter to our goals.

But our communal creativity--our level of commitment to the mission of NSO—keep us dedicated to the defense of more than 5,000 members.

Agerstrand emphasized the need for all NSO members to stand united against the threats by employers to use our economic downturn as a reason to cut wages, shift costs to employees or threaten our pensions.

“The message is clear,” said Agerstrand. “This union and all its affiliates won't tolerate employers coming after us and taking away our hard-fought rights.”

Agerstrand sent members to their Retreat sessions with this reminder, “If they attack one of us, they attack all of us.”



NSO President Chuck Agerstrand's opening remarks remind Retreat participants that NSO is committed to the defense of our members.

Leadership – What's in it for my members?

More than 100 new members chose the 2010 Leadership Academy as their first introduction to NSO.

They came for a lot of different reasons:

“You can't beat this opportunity to network with colleagues.”

“I want to be a stronger asset to my union.”

But when Mike McIlwe, a new leader from Oklahoma said, “I'm from a right to work state. I want to know how this all works. What can I get out of being a part of a union?--he touched on a key issue that all leaders have to deal with—meeting the needs of members.

Mike is in his second year of staff work. His Executive Committee asked him if he would attend the Leadership Academy and Retreat. He jumped at the chance.

“The Leadership Academy exceeded any expectations I had. This isn't just another meeting where people just give you theoretical talk. Here they give you ideas and strategies that have already worked. They know what they're talking about. They've lived it,” Mike said.

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Leadership – What’s in it for my members? (continued)

For Mike, everything his members do in a right to work state revolves around getting members. For him staff work and a staff union mean working with a different set of rules than he was used to.

“We work at generating membership all the time,” noted Mike. “Union is not necessarily the norm in our state. We have to make a point of showing our members the role a union plays in their everyday lives.”

A turning point in Mike’s views on unionism came when Emmitt Jimmar, Region 3 Director and Leadership Academy trainer, talked about what NSO stands for.

“Emmitt reminded us that we provide service to our members. We need to meet their needs. That’s what being a leader is all about,” said Mike.

A SPECIAL CHALLENGE

The Pennsylvania Professional Staff Organization has donated \$1,000 to NSO Haitian Relief Fund. PSA-SO Treasurer, Dan Carey, has issued the challenge to all other affiliates to match their contribution.

They’ve made a challenge. You make the difference.

Pensions, bargaining trends, workloads rank as emerging issues

The 2010 Winter Advocacy Retreat hosted an Emerging Issues session where members could discuss issues they’re facing in their affiliates. It was obvious that pensions, financial uncertainties, increasing workloads and bargaining were topics affecting all of us.

A review of recent activities in the NEA Pension Plan showed that whatever happens, there will be an impact on all states, whether they’re part of the plan or not. NEA would like to see two changes in its Plan—a removal of a cap on employee contributions and a freeze on pension accrual rather than a withdrawal from the plan when a state can no longer fund its liabilities.

The NEA Retirement Board is taking the issues under consideration and in March will make its recommendation to NEA after studying the pros and cons. The Board’s decision will impact more than the 29 employers who are currently in NEA’s plan.

The next couple of months will be critical bargaining for pension and retirement benefits. It’s important that any bargaining teams gather research and data before entering into any agreements. It’s crucial that teams know the financial condition of their pension plans. Despite rocky financial times, most pension plans have recovered 30 to 40 percent since last March.

Another proactive step is to have one of our own members serve on Retirement Boards who can advocate for our positions.

NEA has been gathering data on the unfunded liabilities state affiliates across the country are carrying. It’s a significant amount but NEA is not talking about what it will cost states to pay that liability. What NEA is talking about is the need for management to bargain cuts and rollbacks to ensure they can pay on those liabilities.

NSO is recommending that our members not bear that burden alone. States should be looking at incremental increases in member dues to adequately fund pension plans.

Another issue on the mind of members centers on workload issues. More and more states are not filling vacancies as they occur. Instead either a temp is put in the position indefinitely or other employees are picking up the additional work.

These are contract issues. If there is a violation, there should be a grievance filed.

According to Marius Ambrose, Vice President of Defense, we are losing more and more arbitration cases. In many cases, affiliates are taking what he calls “frivolous” issues to arbitration. Not only is this a misuse of member dollars, it also erodes the contract.

WAR Fast Facts

- NSO collected more than \$3,500 for Haitian earthquake victims.
- In 2011, the Winter Advocacy Retreat will be held in Orange County, CA.
- NSO has taken over the Sarasota Hyatt for this Retreat. Every hotel room but two is occupied by an NSO member.
- The 2012 Winter Advocacy Retreat will be held in Miami, FL.
- For the past two weeks, Florida weathered the longest cold spell since 1927.