

THE ORGANIZATION OF PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES
OF THE
US DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



January 2018

Inside this issue:

OPEDA 2018 Elections	2
MLK Oboservance	2
Treasurer Transition	3
Spotlight on Members	3
2018/2019 Scholarship	4
2018 Unsung Hero	4
CFC	4
Legislation	5
Membership	5

Important Dates

February 22-23

Annual Agricultural
Outlook Forum

“The Roots of Prosperity”

February 22-23, Crystal
Gateway Marriot Hotel
Arlington, Va.

Please visit

www.OPEDA.org
for regular updates

and additional OPEDA
and USDA event
information.



Message From OPEDA President, Ed Dickerhoof



As we go to press the major emerging issue for USDA employees-- and for all federal employees—is the continuing delay by Congress in developing, and passing budget funding appropriations. There has been considerable discussion of changing priorities and improving programs, but few changes can be made in continuing resolutions (CR’s), unless specifically spelled out in the CR. Congress has already had to pass three CR’s since the 2018 fiscal year actually began.

The 2018 USDA President’s Budget was submitted to Congress many months ago. It calls for a number of program emphasis changes and staffing—as these documents often do. The requested FY18 funding was for about \$7 billion more than FY17 funding.

USDA program funding, and other domestic funding, is facing the following headwinds: In early December, 2017, President Trump signed into law a Defense Department authorization bill that allocates \$634 billion for core Pentagon operations; and an additional \$66 billion for current wartime operations—currently ongoing in about 17 countries. But, Congress is now asked to remove a 2018 defense spending cap of \$549. Further, in late December, Congress passed a tax reform bill that could likely reduce federal income at least the next few years. Finally, there are new funding needs as a result of several major hurricanes, storms, and wildfires!!!

In a January 7th Forbes commentary, Stan Collender, writes: “The truth is that Congress and the White House were never really close to a fiscal 2018 deal last December, and aren’t that much closer to one now.... And, then he goes on to say: “Congress adopting this fourth DR in the first four months of the fiscal year normally would prevent a government shutdown. This year may be very different, however, because President Trump may well decide to veto it.

We are now seeing such headlines as “Congress Scrambles to Meet Budget Deadline to Avoid Federal Government Shutdown.” As former longtime Washington Office staffer, the only time I have seen actual scrambling congressmen has been at the Washington National Airport departure gate walkways. And, for really sweaty red faced concern, just be at a gate where a Senator is told a flight departure is delayed indefinitely due to weather!!

So, it would be timely for OPEDA members to contact your own federal Representatives and Senators and urge them to get to work and pass the fiscal 2018 Budget!!! (Please use private e-mail, telephones, and letters on your own time.)

USDA Ranked Among Best Places to Work in Federal Government

Employees have ranked the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as among the top ten best places to work in the federal government, moving up in the rankings to come in at seventh place in 2017. The Best Places to Work in the Federal Government rankings are produced by the Partnership for Public Service and Deloitte and include opinions from more than 498,000 civil servants from 200 federal organizations on a wide range of workplace topics and are widely considered the most comprehensive rating of employee engagement in the federal government.

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue issued the following statement: “Our high-quality USDA employees work hard every day to provide the best possible services to our customers: the farmers, ranchers, foresters, and producers of American agriculture. It’s our shared goal to be the most effective, most efficient, most customer-focused department in the entire federal government. And this year’s rankings show that USDA is also a great place to work and is improving every day. It is an honor to work alongside such dedicated professionals who make coming to work such a pleasure.”



*Election
information will be
updated on
OPEDA's website
at
www.OPEDA.org*

OPEDA 2018 Presidential and Council Election

It is time for the members of the Organization of Professional Employees of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (OPEDA) to elect a new national President as well as an individual in your region to represent you on the OPEDA Council.

Please contact the OPEDA office if you are interested in serving yourself or if you would like to suggest a candidate. If you suggest someone other than yourself, please be sure that this person has indicated that he/she is willing to run.

The new National President of OPEDA will be elected in May/June, 2018. OPEDA encourages nominations of members who live in the greater Metro Washington, DC area for this office. The National President is responsible for the organization nationally and for the operation of the National OPEDA Office. The President serves as a spokesperson for OPEDA and has important interactions, with our USDA Administration, with Congressional offices and with employee and other community organizations.

The OPEDA bylaws describe the method of electing the President in Article III, Section 3.2. By February 1 of the year in which the President's term expires, the President shall appoint a nomination committee comprised of at least three (3) OPEDA members in good standing. The nominating committee shall present to the Council by March 2 as slate of one or more willing candidates for the Presidency from the Washington, D.C. area. Other nominations may be made by the Council Members or by petition signed by at least twenty (2) members in good standing by March 2. A President shall be elected by the entire membership in a national election every third year. The candidate receiving the most votes shall be elected. The elections shall be held between May 1 and June 15. The President may not serve more than two consecutive terms of office.

The OPEDA bylaws describe the method of electing national council members in Article II, Section 2.1. A National Council shall be elected by OPEDA members and shall serve as the governing body of OPEDA. It shall establish priorities, policies and programs which are consistent with the purposes, objectives and principles of OPEDA as set forth in the Constitution. Council Members represent their constituents and interpret and convey to the chapters and to the membership the policies of the Council and information from the National Office. They also keep the National Office informed of activities in their regions and the needs and wishes of local members. The National Council may remove any Council Member by a two-thirds vote of its membership and provide for selection or election of a successor.

The OPEDA bylaws state that each current council member is responsible for electing the individual regions successor. OPEDA can include election information and ballots for council members nominated to serve on the board. Please contact OPEDA if you have suggestions or for any additional information. OPEDA@dm.usda.gov 202.720.4898

USDA's 2018 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Observance and Drum Major for Service Award Ceremony

On Thursday, January 11, 2018, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday was celebrated with the USDA Observance and the "Drum Major for Service Award" Ceremony. Keynote Speakers included Congressman David Scott, Georgia's Thirteenth Congressional District United States Congress.

On this day and throughout the year, all employees are encouraged to perform volunteer service in their communities. For all Americans, to give of their time in service is an important way to celebrate Dr. King's Legacy.

OPEDA Thanks Fred Kaplan for his Dedicated Service as Treasurer and Welcomes Fred Cheng as his Successor



For many years OPEDA has had the pleasure of USDA retired, Fred Kaplan serving as our dedicated Treasurer. As Kaplan switches gears in his retirement, he has decided to serve as an advisor to the board and council as we welcome OPEDA member, Fred Cheng as our new appointed Treasurer. We appreciate the commitment of Kaplan and thank him for his past and future service.

OPEDA Welcomes Fred Cheng



Fred Cheng is the Departmental Diversity and Inclusion Program Manager for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) and the American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN). He is responsible for setting and implementing the USDA's Strategic Goals to include offices and 17 agencies of USDA's AAPI and special emphasis programs. Mr. Cheng is an active member of the following affinity groups; the Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC), Asian American Government Executives Network (AAGEN), Asian Pacific American Network in Agriculture (APANA), Society of American Indian Government Employees (SAIGE), National IMAGE, Inc, Pan-Pacific American Leaders and Mentors (PPLAM) and the Naval Officer Mentor Association (NOMA). He retired in 2017 as a Commander in the U.S. Navy Reserve. In his last assignment, he served as the Executive Officer for the Naval Reserve, Defense Intelligence Agency Headquarters (DIAHQ) 1482 in New Orleans, Louisiana.

OPEDA members interested in serving as a volunteer or on the Board/Council are encouraged to reach out to our main office.

Spotlight on Our Members The Dean of Agricultural Journalists By Dwight Gadsby



OPEDA Member Claude Gifford, who many consider dean of agricultural journalists, was born 1919 in Illinois. Like many who were born in this era, he served in World War II; he flew bombers targeted for Japan. Following World War II, Claude enrolled at Iowa State College at Ames, Iowa. Claude studied with Kenneth Boulding, who was destined to receive a Laureate in economics. Claude received a BS degree from Iowa State College in 1946. Claude then changed his address to: Farm Journal, Washington Sq; at Philadelphia (he was associate editor: editor). He kept this address until 1962, when he was invited to come to Washington DC, Office of The Secretary of Agriculture: Chief of Staff.. He served under Lothrop Orville Freeman, Minnesota chosen by President Kennedy as Secretary of Agriculture in 1961. Gifford would serve seven secretaries in this capacity until his retirement. He continues to write in retirement.

Would you like to celebrate a deserving colleague?

Contact OPEDA at OPEDA@dm.usda.gov to "Spotlight" a USDA employee!

OPEDA Accepting Scholarship Applications for the 2018-2019 School Year



Since 1989 with the support of its members, OPEDA has recognized academic achievement through awarding scholarships to USDA employees who are also OPEDA members and their family members.

OPEDA is now accepting scholarship applications for the 2017-2018 school year. OPEDA members in good standing and their family members attending college (including graduate school) are eligible to apply. OPEDA

places a high premium on education and believes that its scholarships will have a valuable give-back in the future. The scholarships awarded are in honor of exemplary service to OPEDA, the USDA, and our country.

In 1989 the Organization of Professional Employees of the U. S. Department of Agriculture (OPEDA) established the John W. Peterson Scholarship in recognition of Mr. Peterson's dedicated service as the 24th President of OPEDA. Subsequently in 2009, OPEDA also started the Steven "Tom" Stefani Scholarship to honor Mr. Stefani's heroic service and ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan. The Steven "Tom" Stefani Scholarship honors the heroic service and ultimate of sacrifice of this young U. S. Forest Service Range Conservationist, while he was on a voluntary assignment with the USDA Foreign Agriculture Service in Afghanistan.

All required documents must be received or postmarked no later than May 31, 2018. For scholarship forms and further information please visit www.OPEDA.org,

Unsung Hero Award Nominations

OPEDA partnering with the USDA has established a tradition of hosting a special celebration, The Unsung Hero Awards Ceremony to honor and recognize the many and varied public service contributions of our USDA employees. USDA employees (managers, supervisors, or peers) are requested to submit nominations no later than Saturday, March 31st for individuals who have demonstrated a high level of service to the public directly related to the employee's duties. These nominations are reviewed by an independent committee established by OPEDA and USDA and final selections are made. All USDA mission areas and agencies have been active partners in this annual award program in the past, and we invite you to do the same this year.

All nominations are to be received in office, with a post-date, or an e-mail date **no later than Saturday, March 31, 2018** If you would like to become an OPEDA member, please complete the online Membership Application with your submission, sign up at Opeda.UnsungHero@dm.usda.gov, or visit Room 1212, USDA South Building. Paper nominations may be requested by contacting OPEDA: (202) 720-4898 OPEDA, P.O. Box 23762, Washington, D.C. 20026-3762, For more information visit www.OPEDA.org. Completed nominations may be e-mailed to Opeda.UnsungHero@dm.usda.gov

Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) , The World's Largest Workplace-Based Giving Campaign

Supporting the CFC is a proud annual tradition at the USDA. It's an opportunity for us to come together and support charities that make an impact in communities all around the world. Last year, USDA employee contributions helped to feed families struggling to make ends meet, assist those battling an illness in getting the care they need, preserve our environment, and to support many other causes nationwide. Your donations to CFC mean so much to so many people. For nearly a decade, our USDA family has been a generous civilian workforce. That's a proud legacy to be a part of, as well as a responsibility. You can help USDA achieve its contribution goal by contributing online at cfcna.org by one time donation or payroll deduction.





President Trump signed the TSP Modernization Act of 2017, H.R. 3031 into law in November. This legislation provides more flexible withdrawal options for participants in the TSP. Participants may need to wait for over a year to enjoy the new options that include multiple withdrawals, including withdrawals for participants who are over 59 ½, but who are still working. Payments that are quarterly or annual, or are made at any point during the year, will also be possible. Participants will have to wait up to two years to take advantage of these changes, since the Thrift Savings Plan Board must issue the necessary regulations.

President Trump also set the 2018 Federal Employee Pay Raise – effective January 1, 2018 - to include a 1.4 percent across the board increase plus locality based adjustments.

The “tax bill” that affects most U.S. citizens and other residents passed the House on December 20, 2017 and the President signed the bill into law. The bill provides permanent tax cuts for corporations and includes temporary tax cuts for individual taxpayers. The bill doubles the standard deduction, doubles the child tax credit and doubles the size of inheritances shielded from estate taxes. These individual cuts will expire after 2025. Deductions for state and local taxes are capped at \$10,000. The bill also eliminates the requirement that most people have health insurance or pay a penalty (individual mandate).

The bill, H.R 3200, allowing public disclosure of federal pension data, was referred to the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform.

In developing the final FY18 funding bill, there is a danger that federal benefits may be used as an offset to raise sequestration budget caps. ***You may wish to contact your legislators*** with your views on this issue. (Do not use your federal computer or any federal equipment or supplies to make this contact.)

The bills, H.R. 1205/S. 915-- that would repeal both the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP)-- remain referred to House and Senate Committees.

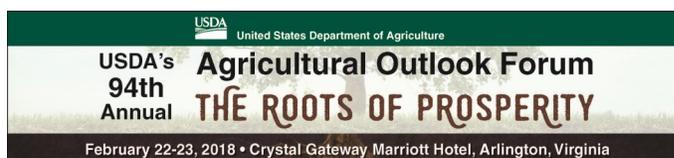
Driving Membership Throughout the USDA

OPRDA members are the heart of the organization! As we continue our collaborative efforts working with USDA agencies, offices, and employee groups, we ask for your help to generate new OPRDA members. We ask you to volunteer to serve and assist with OPRDA operations and initiatives, to market OPRDA to your colleagues, to share your ideas on issues you feel OPRDA needs to pursue, provide your feedback on current OPRDA efforts.

The OPRDA Board and Council are always interested in hearing from you. We look forward to a great 2018 with new monthly meetings to be held in the back of the South Cafeteria for OPRDA members to meet in person and via conference line to network and discuss areas of interest to the public (USDA employees) we serve and the Organization. Please look on www.OPRDA.org for scheduling updates.

Upcoming events to consider volunteering: (Planning committees forming January 2018)

- ◆ Unsung Hero Award planning and evaluation: January-May, Ceremony 1st week of May, Whitten Patio
- ◆ OPRDA Scholarship, evaluation June
- ◆ Membership Drive, ongoing,
- ◆ 2018 Agricultural Outlook Forum-



“The Roots of Prosperity” February 22-23, Crystal Gateway Marriot Hotel Arlington, Va.



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of the US Department of Agriculture*

Thank you for reading the OPEDA
Newsletter. Your comments and
contributions are welcome.

Please contact us: phone-202.720.4898
email- OPEDA@dm.usda.gov
web-www.opeda.org

OPEDA National Office, Room 1212, USDA
South Building, 1400 Independence Ave.,
S.W. Washington DC 20250

www.OPEDA.org

The Organization of Professional Employees of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Membership

For over 85 years, since it was established in April 8, 1929, **OPEDA** has represented professional employees and retirees of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Unlike unions, this representation is extended to both managers and employees. **OPEDA** has worked to enhance the effectiveness of members in the performance of their public service as well as to protect and advance USDA employee interests through organized and concerted effort. **OPEDA** promotes and conducts public service activities through meetings, seminars, workshops and training, and award programs designed to improve the economic and professional advancement of **OPEDA** members. **OPEDA** also works in affiliation with several other professional organizations representing local, state, and national public employee issues in order to promote the efficient and effective operation of agencies of the USDA.

OPEDA invites you to join our organization and help us: (1) to cooperate with other professional groups in government to gain a more effective voice on behalf of professionals; (2) to secure credit towards retirement for all prior Federal-State service of USDA employees; and (3) to assure fair treatment of all USDA employees. Membership is open to all USDA employees and retirees regardless of age, sex, race, religion, nationality, or political affiliation.



Opportunity for Retirees, Stay Active Within the USDA

Join OPEDA's mission to enhance the effectiveness of USDA's employees in the performance of their duties. OPEDA is looking for part time volunteers to assist in pursuing the legislative, member services, and professional development needs of the Organization.

Duties may include: preparing documentation to support the needs of the organization, helping to recruit new members, and developing and implementing new plans and programs to support members. This is an opportunity for retirees to stay active within the USDA, and to support the Organization and its employees.

Location: OPEDA National Office, Room 1212, USDA South Building, 14th and Independence Ave., Washington DC These are not paid positions. Volunteers enjoy flexible schedules and choose their area of service. If you are interested in membership or volunteering, please contact Dana Manning, Director of Communications, at OPEDA@dm.usda.gov