



# 2008 National Staff Organization Representative Assembly June 6-7, 2008 - San Diego, CA

## Delegate Report

NSO President Chuck Agerstrand’s opening challenge to those gathered at this year’s Representative Assembly (RA) was, “Are you prepared to stand with me and continue the fight for our members?”

Agerstrand reinforced the need for NSO members (that’s all of CAS!) to work together – not against each other – so we are unified against common enemies. He reminded delegates, “An injury to one is an injury to all of us.”

Two CAS representatives attended the New Delegate Orientation, even though they have been delegates in prior years: Debra Oshige and Dean Chandler (read on...).

Our very own Dawn Basurto was one of two who spoke on their Harvard Trade Union experience and how it relates to their local affiliates (her report is below). Regardless of the challenges of this experience, both took back home new information and a new perspective on unions.

Our newest NSO affiliate is the North Dakota Associate staff. The Wisconsin delegation was the largest at the 2008 RA. The Virginia associate staff, previously the newest affiliate (and about whom we have done several stories in our CAS Connection) has changed its name to the Virginia Associate Staff Organization (VASO) and (drum roll, please) no longer has to hold bake sales or sell merchandise to pay their way home.

See end of this report for upcoming NSO dates.

- Carole Hester, CAS Communications Chair

\*\*\*\*\*

## Roseanne Becher, CAS President

NSO President Chuck Agerstrand opened the 2008 NSO RA by stating the regressive policies of the Bush Administration (i.e., Department of Labor harassment and audits of NSO and Affiliates) must end with a Democratic President. He stated that the current administration has attempted to weaken unions and that employers struggling to comply with federal law have tried to shift related costs to employees.

Despite challenges, Mr. Agerstrand noted, because NSO's investment policy on the funds committed to assist affiliates in crisis, NSO is better funded than ever before and has provided assistance to affiliates (such as CAS) in many ways. He continued to say, "NSO is here, is available, and has power to meet challenges head on." One of the successes he cited was, due to NSO organizing, NEA was forced to put in writing the funding promise to cover benefits for NSO members who are covered by the NEA Pension Plan. Also, in the past year, NSO had a successful Pension Summit and National CBC.

Another issue emphasized was that Associate staff needs to be afforded equal opportunity for training. NSO needs not to lose sight of what we are about...defend our members to the best of our ability...

Four questions we need to ask:

- 1) What are we doing?
- 2) What should we be doing?
- 3) What should we be doing next?
- 4) What should we not be doing?

President Agerstrand closed by stating, "Send a clear message to our employers; if you take on one, you take on all. Anybody that takes on a **local Affiliate** (such as CAS) takes on the National Organization." He reminded the delegates that, "An injury to one is an injury to all of us."

Marius Ambrose, NSO Vice President of Defense, after speaking about the Ohio EA Retirees and their litigation struggles, stated, "If Management wants to talk about language in the contract related to Retiree benefits, just say NO." **"Do not touch the language!"**

Lynn Adler, NSO Vice President of Programs, said that most requests for assistance from affiliates were related to internal struggles, team building and conflict resolution. She stated, "We have to stop destroying from within."

As the CAS President, my impressions after attending the NSO meetings:

I came to understand even more fully that the national issues are our issues. Even though CAS appears to be so much better off than many of our affiliates, what happens to them can happen to us, especially if we forget how we got what we have. I feel fortunate to have had the chance to talk with the many friends and acquaintances that I've made over the past two years. I will truly miss the numerous conversations, away from the structured sessions, where the casual settings enabled us to get to know each other on a personal level. I am grateful for the opportunity to represent the California Associate Staff and I wish to thank NSO for all their invaluable assistance these last two years.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Debra Oshige**

I arrived in San Diego on Thursday afternoon in time to attend the first-ever NSO New Delegate Orientation. Even though this was my second year serving as a delegate, I was interested

in learning the proper delegate protocol and how the NSO RA operates. It was a valuable and informative session attended by over 40 new and returning delegates.

On Friday, the RA opened with a general session attended by 388 participants, including 307 delegates from across the country. Our newest NSO affiliate is the North Dakota Associate Staff, who sent one delegate to her first RA. The RA acted on many business items, including ratifying a 2008-09 budget, endorsing Barack Obama for President, and defeating proposals to increase NSO-retired dues and to lend the retirees of Ohio EA \$100,000 to pay for legal expenses incurred in fighting to retain employer-provided medical benefits with no guarantee of repayment.

NSO Vice President of Defense Marius Ambrose announced “management is continuing attacks on the rights and privileges contained in our collective bargaining agreements.” His defense team, comprised of volunteers from around the country (many retired NSO members), give their time willingly to defend NSO members. In the last year, NSO has assisted over 70 NSO affiliates involving cross-country travel and daily email and telephone consultation. As there have been several e-mail usage reprimand cases this past year, Marius alerted affiliates to remind members to be mindful that the employer owns the email system and employees must abide by company email policies. Of particular concern were the alarming number of affiliate internal member-to-member conflicts and internal group vs. group issues that the defense team dealt with. As a result there were more requests for NSO to provide team-building trainings.

I especially enjoyed the keynote speaker Mel Mylar’s presentation about how unions can grow and change by moving beyond just a “servicing” approach to also build organizational capacity and power through organizing. He emphasized the importance of involving the membership in the development of a union’s core values, mission and vision. Core values and a vision that is developed collaboratively will engage members and leaders, and will guide the decision-making process of the union and will determine activities and programs offered to the membership. Having a common vision gives a collective sense of who we are and provides purpose and meaning for our work in the union. Mr. Mylar challenged delegates with this statement: *“An organization never stands still; it is either moving forward or moving backwards.” What direction is your organization moving?”*

I am grateful for the opportunity to represent CAS members at this annual NSO event.

In Solidarity,  
Debra Oshige

\* \* \* \* \*

## Rhonda King

*An injury to one of us is an injury to all of us. If you take on one of us, you take on all of us. And, an injury to one of us is a concern for all of us.* These messages were key to this year’s 2008 NSO Representative Assembly.

NSO President Chuck Agerstrand stressed that there is a movement in this country on the part of local leadership to do whatever it can to strip away our rights under our collective bargaining agreements. This movement is alive and well. Elected leaders are trying to control all

aspects of our associations and we need to make certain that our contracts are not diminished in any way. Affiliates face this challenge with NSO by their side.

Working together within our associations was addressed repeatedly by the speakers. We need to resolve our internal conflicts in our associations and stop destroying ourselves from within. We must work together, not against one another, so that we are unified against our common enemies.

In a powerful display of unity, the entire delegation stood to show their support of the 2008 NSO Representative Assembly theme, “Solidarity: Yesterday, Today, Forever.”

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Kathy Hill**

At this year’s RA, NSO President Chuck Agerstrand’s opening remarks gave the NSO Delegates the following challenge “Are you prepared to stand with me and continue the fight for our members?” While his question was met with thunderous applause and a rousing “yes,” Agerstrand noted some of the issues we are facing across the country.

“There is a movement on the part of governance to strengthen their ability to hire, evaluate and terminate their staff.” “Our contracts are the last things in their way to them having sole discretion over staff.” He continued with stating that there is evidence of this being seen in the recent hiring of state Executive Directors who have no experience with unions or education.

President Agerstrand made it clear that despite governance tactics, a national effort to weaken unions, and the Department of Labor harassment, NSO can cite a long list of successes.

He stated that NSO is better organized, better trained and better funded than ever before. In conclusion, he stated the need for union members to work together – not against each other, as management enjoys our internal battles knowing that they weaken our organizations. In being unified, and walking the walk and talking the talk of solidarity, we are united against our common enemies.

Never forget fellow colleagues, as this is truly a powerful union saying – “An injury to one is an injury to all of us!”

Thank you for allowing me to represent you at the 2008 RA. Networking with fellow colleagues both from CAS and from around the country helps to promote confidence and strength for the betterment of advocacy for all members.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Dawn Basurto**

The NSO Representative Assembly was yet again a great learning experience with valuable information on what other states are facing. For the very first time there was a new delegate orientation where 40 new and not so new delegates attended. It was very informative even for the more experienced delegate.

A great presentation was given by Mel Myler retired Executive Director of the National Council State Education Association and the message he left with the delegates to think about was are you a “seed or a stone”? He wanted us to start to think outside of the box, so many times we get so rooted in our beliefs we forget to look at things at a different perspective.

As an NSO scholarship recipient I was asked along with another colleague to speak about our experience at the Harvard Trade Union Program, one of the things I spoke about was always wanting to do your best and how this program has helped me grow as an individual and as an advocate for the labor movement. I want to again thank the members for voting for me to attend this year NSO RA.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Michelle Bomberry**

I flew into San Diego on Thursday afternoon in order to attend the NSO New Delegate Orientation. Unfortunately, a trip to the Emergency Room took precedence over my intentions. Luckily, I was able to return health and happy to attend the rest of the Representative Assembly.

Friday’s general session was made up of speeches from the NSO Executive Officers. NSO President, Chuck Agerstrand reported that AFSE (Association of Field Service Employees) had just obtained a hard-fought contract settlement with NEA. Much of this success can be attributed to the fact that the association had joined forces through a “Solidarity Agreement” with the brother affiliate NEASO (NEA Staff Organization). He encouraged other state affiliates to look into forming similar solidarity structures.

There was a general theme to Friday’s speeches by the NSO Officers: Internal Conflict. Marius Ambrose, NSO Vice President of Defense spoke of the 70 instances of assistance, and 137 responses to requests that NSO has provided this year. A lot of these requests had centered on internal member disputes, including legal conflicts and even NLRB issues. Lynn Adler, Vice President of Program, also spoke about the increase in training requests surrounding member-to-member conflict issues such as team building and conflict resolution.

Additionally, the key-note speaker, Mel Mylar spoke on the importance of member-driven development of core values. He encouraged us to look at our associations and decide if the time and resources being spent fighting internally could be better used to create a system of change. *“I am asking you to become a catalyst for change. When people feel heard, when they feel understood and supported, they are more likely to change.”*

This theme really hit me. I would really like to see CAS working toward resolving any internal issues we have and moving forward as a strong, united force in this bargaining year.

Thank you for the opportunity to represent CAS in this national forum. I was able to network with many of our brother and sister unions and have come back with an arsenal of ideas ready to put into action!

\* \* \* \* \*

## Dean Chandler

On June 5, 2008 I attended the NSO orientation. It was received well by everyone attending. Along with giving everyone a history lesson on NSO, Vice President of Defense, Marius Ambrose discussed one of the most important services NSO provides its state affiliates: Assistance with grievances and arbitrations. According to Mr. Ambrose there are several basic steps NSO affiliates can take to get the best results.

As veteran union member, and having attended several WAR colleges, once again I was impressed with the message to first-timers that grievance handling and arbitration is where you will really find out what NSO is all about. I stood and spoke to those gathered about how important this concept really is to them. Lynn Adler came up to me after and thanked me.

Mr. Ambrose was clear on the process of grievances and arbitration. If a grievance goes to Arbitration, CAS will be in contact with NSO.

TIMELINES...If you believe there is a contractual violation, be sure to immediately contact your CAS representatives. Delaying could result in exceeding the allowable time lines for filing a grievance. The grievance procedure must be followed in order to assure your rights under the contract. It doesn't matter how in-depth the evidence is or how egregious the violations are, if you don't follow your negotiated grievance procedure the case can be lost on a technicality. Mr. Ambrose stated: "It's unfortunate how many arbitrations are dismissed because of something as basic as not meeting the timelines."

Decisions based on the political climate within our state affiliates often influence our decision to take an issue to arbitration.

It's very important that NSO affiliates carefully review the merits of a grievance at the pre-arbitration level. Arbitration decisions should be based on merit not data. Affiliates should determine, among other things, whether the grievance affects a class of employees or does the grievance potentially raise a question better left unanswered. These and other issue related questions should be answered and the potential implications carefully weighed by the affiliate prior to taking the grievance to arbitration. If, after careful consideration, the affiliate does decide to take the case to arbitration, NSO will pay the expense of the advocate and reimburse the affiliate 50% of the costs of the arbitration as well as the AAA filing fee. There were many new attendees this year and the orientation was a great tool to welcome in the new advocates.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Patricia McCallum

As a first time attendee to the NSO RA, I was awed by the sheer force of advocacy represented at the national level. To see Staff and Associate Staff come together as a whole for the same reason—to protect our members, our contracts, and our right to bargain—was truly an amazing sight. There were many new faces along with familiar ones interspersed throughout. It was an opportunity to connect with others from around the States. It was also distressing to hear the struggles some of our colleagues are going through. It is disheartening to know that they are

fighting for the very basic of rights. Being able to share their struggles and offer solutions and support is, to me, the biggest reason of all to hold and attend the NSO RA.

The RA provides a face to unions affiliated with the NSO. Unions are made up of members—members are individuals—individuals are the Union.

\*\*\*\*\*

TIDBITS...

- The National CBC Conference will be Sept. 19-20, 2009
- Requests for Proposals for the Winter Advocacy Retreat are available at [www.nationalstaff.org](http://www.nationalstaff.org). The completed forms must be submitted by July 25.
- The Winter Advocacy Retreat will be held Jan. 16-17, 2009, in Anaheim, CA
- The 2009 RA will be held June 12-13, 2009, in Jacksonville, FL. The Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront will be the site.

## June 2008 NSO RA CAS Reps

