

# NSO Contact

## National Staff Organization

2011 NSO RA Issue 2

### Should we be worried?

### **Delegates focus on challenges, strategies for dealing with attacks on union rights from legislators and employers**

“So, do we have the courage and passion to fight for our rights?”

If there was any doubt when NSO President Chuck Agerstrand asked that of delegates on Friday morning, the answer was pretty clear by the end of the day.

Each speaker emphasized the idea that despite the attacks we’re fighting at bargaining tables, in our Legislatures and within our own affiliates, we have to find new ways to deal with these challenges. We have to listen to one another and the people we advocate.

Agerstrand set the tone for the Assembly by describing the “state of the NSO union” as being better positioned than ever before to deal with today’s challenges. “Our finances are solid and our reserves are adequate,” stated Agerstrand.

But is that enough? Should we be worried?

It would be foolish to think that we can sit idly by and watch as more jobs are outsourced, as the middle class is disappearing and our members are seeing no future to latch on to.

When the delegates answered “yes” to Agerstrand’s question, it confirmed that our power flows from not just being members of state affiliates but members of a strong national union.

“NSO is not just a membership card,” said Agerstrand. “It’s a commitment to each other. We win because we turn to each other—not turn on each other.”

### **Raabe: The World is Changing**

In the afternoon, Bill Raabe, NEA’s Director of Collective Bargaining and Member Advocacy, offered ways for NSO to meet the challenges state affiliates are facing.

While Raabe listed more than a dozen challenges, he emphasized that it’s not individual issues we have to focus on.

Raabe explained, “All of these issues are distractions. The real issue is power—‘who will control the country?’”

For Raabe, gaining control means evaluating our assets and our Achilles heel. Our members are our “potential” greatest assets. Our Achilles heel is that too often we believe that if we could just go back to the way we were—everything would be better.

But that dooms us to failure. To face the changing world, Raabe recommends we look at these threats as opportunities. It means we need to know who our members are and what they want; we need to know our internal and external climate; and we need to know what capacity we have to act.

“We can’t just sit around and make excuses. We have to advocate, organize and do what’s necessary,” said Raabe.



Bill Raabe

### What's disgusting? Union busting!

Delegates quickly moved their focus from Raabe's national perspective to Wisconsin which has been the lightning rod for union activities.

Eugene Dunk, president of the Wisconsin professional staff union, explained how their governor's "budget repair bill" took away the voice of union members in their own profession.

"Our lives changed in February. We've had no time to internalize what's happened. We're worried about how others are surviving," said Dunk

But as we all know, the governor got a fight and the inspiring video Dunk showed delegates detailed that fight.

While recall efforts and rallies continue, the story from Wisconsin isn't necessarily encouraging for staff. Craig Spring, vice president of the staff union, explained that governance and management aren't utilizing the labor/management strategies Raabe outlined.

The staff union has a four-year agreement but they offered to take the same cuts as the members— 5.8 percent in pension, 12 percent in pension, and forego a raise—in return for job security.

Their proposal is being met with a potential loss of 100 staff positions and a 20 percent business loss for their insurance trust.

Spring said, "When you're at war, you don't cut the troops. We have to convince management that they're doing this the wrong way."

### So what do we do?

Delegates took the information from the day's speakers to discuss the ways NSO can help affiliates deal with the crises they're facing. Facilitated small-group discussions provided the information NSO will use to plan agendas for the October CBC meetings and the Winter Advocacy Retreat. Notes from the groups will be posted at [www.nationalstaff.org](http://www.nationalstaff.org).

### NSO RA News Briefs

Marius Ambrose, Vice President for Defense, announced that we are losing 78 percent of arbitrations brought to NSO. He cited frivolous issues as one of the reasons. He encouraged affiliates to base their desire to move to arbitration on the merits of the issue—not past practice.

Lynn Adler, Vice President for Program, has seen an increase in the number of crisis training requests from affiliates. She's also recorded an increase in the number of affiliates needing internal conflict resolution work. President Agerstrand pointed out that unions win when they turn to each other—not turn on each other.

Ron Goldenstein, NSO Treasurer, pointed out that five years ago, NSO was not in sound financial state. While since then we've earned 21.5 percent on our investments, a revenue increase, a membership decrease and a spending increase—especially on grievance and arbitration cases—a dues increase is still recommended.

In his CBC report, Region 2 Director Butch Santicola called out employers who have demanded concessions from staff while hoarding huge reserves. He called it "NUTS"—not understanding the situation. That's why it's critical that we come together nationally to set our course for the future. The national CBC is scheduled for Oct. 21-22.

Mary Henson, NSO Secretary reported 286 delegates.

The 2012 Winter Advocacy Retreat is scheduled for Feb. 3-4 at the Hyatt Regency Miami.

Bill Raabe's Power Point presentation will be available on the Web at [www.nationalstaff.org](http://www.nationalstaff.org).



Be sure to check [www.nationalstaff.org](http://www.nationalstaff.org) for more stories and live interviews from the 2011 NSO RA.