

Chronology of Tax Initiative Events

George R. Wilken

2008-2009

An initial meeting was convened in Spring 2008 to discuss the possibility of making a presentation to the Arkansas Legislature to lobby for a reduction in federal retirees' state income tax. George Wilken volunteered to put together a presentation which would be made to the Governor of Arkansas and to the Arkansas Legislators. Wally Sheldon and Winston Wolfe are the co-coordinators of the effort.

A bill was put together based on the presentation created by George Wilken.

July 15, 2008: Plans were made by Wally Sheldon and Winston Wolfe to meet with the Governor of Arkansas. The meeting actually took place with one of the Governor's aides. Although the group felt that the meeting was productive, they were told that the Governor had certain priorities that he was hoping to accomplish.

After the visit to the Governor's office, Wally Sheldon made arrangements for a rally in support of the bill to be held on Thursday, January 15, 2009.

As Public Relations Officer George Wilken arranged to place two ads in the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette and matching funds were requested and received from NARFE National. In addition, bright ribbons were ordered to identify the group when the meeting took place.

Representative Donna Hutchinson made contact with Wally Sheldon and stated that she was withdrawing her support from the bill she had drawn up, due to a question about its constitutionality.

Before the January meeting, Wally Sheldon and Carl and Jean Garner spoke with some of the Arkansas Legislators and arranged to have Representatives Randy Stewart and Lance Reynolds look at the bill that was being proposed. Representative Stewart also had it stated to him that the bill Representative Hutchinson had drawn up was unconstitutional, so without contacting us, had two bills with wording similar to the 2007 bill that was presented, unknown to us, to make the filing deadline.

Prior to the January 15, 2009 meeting George Wilken contacted the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, the four Little Rock television stations and

KARN News with a press release to announce that the rally was going to take place. Unfortunately, only one TV stations showed up.

One of the ads appeared on January 7, 2009, the week before the meeting at the State Capitol, with the second ad appearing on January 13, 2009.

Before the rally took place, a meeting was held at Baptist Health Medical Center to map out some strategy for the rally.

On January 15, 2009, the rally took place at 1 PM in the rotunda of the State Capitol. It was estimated that from 125 to 150 NARFE members from around the state attended the event. Those in attendance were provided an overview of the presentation by Wally Sheldon and George Wilken and Representative Randy Stewart made a brief presentation about the bills he had submitted.

After the rally, it was felt that a meeting with Representative Stewart would be highly desirable to ask a few questions and generally find out what his thoughts were on the bills he had submitted.

Carl and Jean Garner arranged for a meeting with Representative Stewart on February 11, 2009 at the State Capitol. The Garners have been very active in moving the process along.

Representative Stewart and later Representative Reynolds spoke with the group. Those who were present found that Mr. Stewart was very well informed on what we were trying to do. He again repeated that the original bill that was put together was unconstitutional due to a ruling after the McFadden vs. Weiss adjudication. Both representatives said that our bill had little chance of being passed this session due to the fact that our intentions had not become widely known and that more bills existed than the money that was available.

Representative Stewart then recommended that the bill be pulled and put through an Interim Study. This is a process that helps provide more information helpful to the bill's passage and allows the bill to become better known. In addition, the committee that hears the bill may be lobbied more intensely so that passage becomes more likely. It was decided by the group to follow this line of thinking and go for the Interim Study. (A reminder that Oklahoma took 15 years to get their initiative passed.)

George Wilken will work with Representative Stewart and whoever else to move the Interim Study forward. The study will not start until after the Legislature adjourns, which is expected around April 1st. Before the study starts, the Attorney General's office will be consulted for a ruling on the constitutionality of our original bill. This will let everyone know on how to proceed or how to alter the current bills. Once the study is complete, we will meet with the responsible committee(s) and pose the bill's presentation for next year, since the Legislature will meet every year until that new law changes.

Active participants in the process have been Charles Schmieder, Wally Sheldon, Winston Wolfe, George Wilken, Jim Geisler, Jim Kuzilik, Jim Jones and Carl and Jean Garner.

For the time being, chapters are not being asked to send letters to their Arkansas Legislators. We will let everyone know when that time comes.

IT IS VERY IMPORTANT that any information or requests for information be channeled through people such as George Wilken to keep continuity. The people working on this initiative since last year are the ones to contact or have a legislator request information from. We cannot afford to irritate any of the Arkansas Legislators since we will be going to them for help on this bill. We must cultivate the members of the committee(s) that will decide on the future of the bill. This is a very sensitive process and we must use all of our good will and contacts to help bring this bill to the legislators.