2016 NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Human and Civil Rights Award Winner

FEA Leaders Win Equal Rights for Domestic Partners and Same-Sex Spouses

• H.T. Nguyen and Michael Priser •

Virginia Uribe Award for Creative Leadership in Human Rights

H.T. Nguyen is a member of the National Council on Federal Labor Management Relations and an Executive Director at the NEA’s Federal Education Association (FEA). He received his bachelors and masters in Political Science from the Catholic University of America and his JD from the Catholic University of America, School of Law.

Michael Priser is the Vice President of the FEA. Mr. Priser began his career as a school guidance counselor at the Oregon State School for the Deaf. He then went to work as a school psychologist for Seattle Public Schools. After transitioning to the Department of Defense Dependent Schools, Priser served as a psychologist for 23 different schools in Germany for 16 years.

Together, H.T. Nguyen, and Michael Priser dedicated an extensive amount of time and energy to negotiating with the Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) to gain benefits for domestic partners and married spouses. This was prior to President Barack Obama’s pledge to end “don’t ask don’t tell” and the Supreme Court’s ruling on marriage equality.

Thanks to their efforts, domestic partners and married same-sex spouses have gained transfer rights that had previously not been extended. This was a huge step forward in the face of Federal laws and regulations which did not provide for equal treatment. (The joint-transfer benefit gives teaching couples a chance to stay together despite job moves to new school districts in other countries.)

According to a Memorandum of Understanding between the DODEA and the FEA, “The parties further agree that if DODEA employees are in a legally recognized same-sex marriage or civil union, then these DODEA employees will be eligible to participate in the Transfer Program.” The impact on FEA members’ lives has been very positive; and the policy change has provided a positive role model for the federal workforce.

Brian L. Chance, NEA Director for FEA says, “Mr. Nguyen and Mr. Priser are social justice warriors who one step at a time helped achieve equal treatment. They have continued to work with members in the struggle for equal treatment by the Department of Defense.”