

IRRA Holds Its 2002 National Forum in Washington, DC

by John K. Steinmeyer

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The Industrial Relations Research Association (IRRA) held its 4th Annual Policy Forum in Washington, DC, on June 20-21, 2002. The theme of the Forum was "Working Families: Private Practices and Public Policies to Promote Economic Security, Well-being, and Work-life Balance."

Two plenary sessions were held the first day. At the first session, Solicitor of Labor Eugene Scalia spoke of the current priorities of the U.S. Department of Labor to clarify labor and employment laws and to provide compliance assistance to employers and workers. Scalia said that Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao had created the job of Director of Compliance to achieve the latter purpose.

In the second plenary session, the speaker was Victoria A. Lipnic, Assistant Secretary, Employment Standards Administration, U.S. Department of Labor. She spoke of the need to create more workplace flexibility in the face of demands by employers and families. Today's employers need to attract and retain skilled workers. In order to do so, employer policies must allow workers the flexibility to handle personal and family matters. These policies, over the long run, will maintain productivity. Workplace flexibility is thus linked to work-life integration.

The Forum also offered five groups of sessions over the two days. Comprising each of the groups were three concurrent sessions devoted to a different aspect of the main Forum theme. Presenters at each session included representatives of nongovernment policy organizations, labor organizations, business, government, and academia. Group 1 included concurrent sessions covering Social Security and old-age benefits, discrimination in the workplace, and raising the technological skills of the workforce. Group 2 included sessions devoted to strategies for an aging workforce, unemployment insurance programs, and solutions to the work-life integration.

Group 3 included presentations on pension and retirement plans, violence at home and work, and child labor protection. Group 4's sessions included privacy in the workplace, press coverage of working families, and temporary assistance to needy families. Group 5's sessions ended the Forum with topics including health improvement of working families, living and minimum wages, and benefits for the victims of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

The next major event for the national IRRA organization was its 55th Annual Meeting in Washington, DC, on January 2-5, 2003. Information on that event can be obtained on the Internet at www.irra.uiuc.edu.