



September 1, 2011

Senator Patty Murray
Co-Chair
Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction

Dear Senator Murray:

As National President of the National Treasury Employees Union, the largest independent federal employees union, representing over 150,000 employees in 31 different agencies, I am writing to urge you to oppose proposals affecting federal pensions or federal employees' health programs as you begin deficit reduction negotiations. As you well remember, the very first budget reduction move was to freeze federal pay for two years, despite the fact that federal pay has been documented as 23% below similar private sector jobs. The budget outline prepared by the Senate Budget Committee achieved significant deficit reduction without devastating new cuts to federal compensation and benefits. They recognized that the FERS retirement system is very much in line with private sector retirement plans and has been referred to as a model retirement program. They rejected changes to the federal health benefits program that would further reduce frozen salaries. We ask that you consider a similar balanced approach to deficit reduction.

We also ask your help in maintaining an adequate federal workforce. In many federal agencies, federal employees are already doing their important work with limited resources. For example, since the beginning of the economic downturn, social security claims and disability appeals have skyrocketed. In the 25-month period ending in October 2010 the number of claims pending a disability medical decision rose from 556,670 to 851,812, an increase of 53 percent. Wait times for disability claims were reduced from 532 days in August, 2008, to 377 days in October 2010. Cutting personnel will likely halt that progress. In 1995 IRS had a staff of 114,018 to administer the tax law and process 205 million returns. Today, they have 93,337 employees, yet must process approximately 236 million much more complicated tax returns. FDA's enormous responsibility to monitor our food supply has been seriously challenged, as recent scares with tomatoes, lettuce, spinach and pet food have shown. In 1978, resources allowed 35,000 food inspections. Last year that declined to approximately 7,500. FDA's Medical Device Center personnel, shrunk from over 1,450 in 2003, to just 1,350 last year.

We believe that shared sacrifice among the rest of the American population should be discussed before demanding further cuts from the federal workforce. A plan that does not include closing tax loopholes for oil companies or corporate jets, or other groups in the top one percent of income in this country while imposing additional cuts on middle-class federal workers is simply not fair. Federal employees didn't cause this crisis and the crisis won't be solved by cuts to federal employees.

I would be happy to meet with you at your earliest convenience to discuss in greater detail how the committee will proceed in its deliberations. For further information, please contact Maureen Gilman at 202-572-5500, ext. 7019 or Cathy Ball at ext. 8067.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Colleen M. Kelley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Colleen M. Kelley
National President