

NTEU

The National Treasury Employees Union

September 12, 2008

Assistant Secretary Robert Stephan
Infrastructure Protection
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Assistant Secretary:

I recently read a news report about a speech you delivered to the National Defense Industrial Association, and I was alarmed and dismayed by what I read. According to the report, you said that 'bureaucrats' impede progress in the war on terrorism and spend their days protecting their own turf. You compared the bureaucracy to al Qaeda and concluded that it was the No. 1 killer in the United States.

These are irresponsible comments, and the 200,000 employees who work at the Department of Homeland Security (Department or DHS) deserve better. As the president of the union that represents 20,000 Customs and Border Protection (CBP) employees and Transportation Security Administration (TSA) employees at several major airports, I can attest to their dedication, professionalism and devotion to their jobs, the Department's mission and this country.

Remarks like these, that perpetuate a negative stereotype of federal employees and, in particular, DHS workers, should not be made by anyone, let alone one of the Department's top leaders. Your position within DHS is what made another one of your remarks so disturbing. According to the media report, you said that you spend most of your time shooting bullets into the back of the bureaucracy. Painting such a violent visual picture is inappropriate and were these thoughts to be uttered by a school-aged child they would draw an immediate public outcry and response. I ask that you apologize to all DHS employees for such a thoughtless comment, and I urge you to better pick your words in the future.

There is a massive morale crisis at DHS which finds itself at or near the bottom of a ranking of 36 federal agencies whose employees are surveyed by the Office of Personnel Management on such critical issues as job satisfaction, leadership and knowledge management, results-oriented performance culture, and talent management.

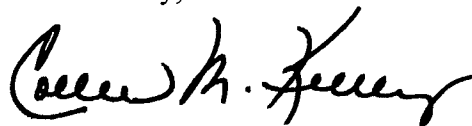
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The success DHS has enjoyed in its five years of existence is due mainly to its employees, who come to work each and every day proud of their role in keeping our country secure. These employees continue to show up and work hard despite management failings, a lack of effective leadership and little respect for their contributions.

I believe it is time to change the culture at DHS and throughout the federal government that has made employees the enemy. Enclosed is a copy of a Public Service Campaign that the National Treasury Employees Union launched this summer. Titled "Federal Employees... They Work for U.S." this campaign is designed to counter negative stereotypes about federal employees and help the American public understand the role that federal employees play in keeping our country safe, strong, and secure.

I am sure you will agree, as leaders across the public and private sectors do, that any organization's strength is based on its employees, and DHS has one of the most highly trained, professional, and dedicated workforces to be found in the United States. I am very proud to represent CBP and TSA employees, and I invite you to visit any of the 326 air, land, and seaports where these men and women serve as the first line of defense against terrorism. I am sure that you will reconsider your comments after spending time with these employees.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Colleen M. Kelley".

Colleen M. Kelley
National President

Enclosure