



OUR FUTURE ■ OUR FIGHT

2026 LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

PREVENTING THE POLITICIZATION OF THE CIVIL SERVICE BY ENSURING AGENCIES CAN FULFILL THEIR MISSIONS

Federal agencies provide critical services that the American people rely on every day. For example, Patent & Trademark Office (PTO) employees process patent and trademark applications to protect the intellectual property of American inventors and businesses so they can bring new products to market and create jobs. Social Security Administration (SSA) employees review disability insurance payments to make sure they are valid and to prevent fraud. Health and Human Services employees manage grants to ensure proper use of taxpayer money. Cutting agency funding combined with the mass firing of federal employees and coercing employees to resign makes it almost impossible for agencies to provide these services on behalf of the American people. Underfunding and understaffing these agencies means longer waits to get your Social Security check or your tax refund. It means food and pharmaceutical plants in China, India or other countries can import impure products with no inspection. It means there are not enough first responders and firefighters to help our parks and monuments during emergencies or staff to make needed repairs. It means undermining efforts to ensure that every American has safe drinking water and clean air and that our national security is protected by securing our nuclear arsenal. Congress must oppose funding cuts and mass firings and ensure that agencies have the staff and resources necessary to provide the services Congress intended instead of allowing political whims to determine which services Americans continue to receive.

At the IRS, for example, since FY 2023, annual funding for the IRS has been reduced by more than \$1.1 billion. At the same time, lawmakers have rescinded tens of billions of dollars in supplemental funding from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which originally provided nearly \$80 billion over ten years to improve taxpayer services, modernize IT systems, and strengthen enforcement focused on high-income and complex noncompliance. As a result, the IRS has faced growing resource constraints despite rising workload demands and an increasingly complex tax system.

These funding reductions have had measurable adverse impacts on service, enforcement, and revenue collection. Reduced resources, combined with a 27% reduction in staff since last year through reductions in force, hiring freezes, and increased retirements, have diminished institutional capacity and frontline taxpayer services. These constraints have increased wait times, delayed processing of returns and refunds, and contributed to growing correspondence backlogs. Cuts to enforcement funding have also limited the IRS's ability to pursue complex audits, contributing to a wider tax gap and lower federal revenue, costing the government more than the savings from reduced funding. Together, insufficient annual funding and the rescission of supplemental resources, which were originally designed to support long-term modernization and improvements, have weakened the agency's operational capacity and limited its ability to enhance compliance and taxpayer service over time.

At the Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) employees at 328 international air, sea and land ports of entry are on the frontline of legal trade and travel

facilitation and illegal trade and travel interdiction, in particular illegal narcotics interdiction, with over 90 percent of illicit narcotics, including fentanyl, entering the U.S. through ports of entry. Additionally, CBP employees at the ports of entry are the second largest revenue-collecting source in the federal government and enforces nearly 500 U.S. laws and regulations.

Until the passage of H.R. 1, known as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), CBP's most recent Workload Staffing Model (WSM) showed CBP significant staffing shortages at the ports of entry across the board for CBP Officers, Agriculture Specialists and Trade Specialists. The OBBBA funded the hiring of 5,000 new CBP Officers between 2025 and 2030, however, most of those new hires are not on board yet and the recent deployment of CBP Officers outside designated mission areas to support other law enforcement agencies means that there remains a shortage of CBPOs to work at the ports of entry.

Moreover, significant shortages remain for all other CBP employees at the ports of entry. To address these additional trade and travel enforcement staffing shortages at the ports of entry, clear statutory limits must be established on when, how, and under what circumstances CBP Officers may be deployed outside their designated mission areas and additional funding is needed for 240 additional CBP Agriculture Specialists, 200 CBP Agriculture Technicians, 20 Agriculture Canine Teams as authorized by P.L. 116-122, 200 non-uniformed trade enforcement specialists and associated operational support personnel.

In addition to proposed funding cuts, there have been threats to use the appropriations process to undermine the independence of our government's banking and consumer protection agencies and to eliminate several agencies that provide critical services. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the Securities & Exchange Commission (SEC), and the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) all bring in many times over their budgets in disgorgements, fines and penalties as they protect American investors, savers, retirees and servicemembers. Immediate action is needed to ensure employees at the CFPB do not lose their jobs and that they are allowed to do their important work protecting the American consumer.

NTEU urges:

- **Support for sufficient agency funding to keep agencies open and ensure they can meet their missions.**
- **Opposition to the mass firing of federal workers and efforts forcing employees to resign that undermines agency missions and the public's trust in government.**
- **Support for additional funding to increase staffing for Agriculture Specialists, Trade Specialists, and support personnel at the ports of entry.**
- **Support for statutory limits on when, how, and under what circumstances CBP Officers may be deployed outside their designated mission areas.**
- **Opposition to efforts to rescind funding provided in the Inflation Reduction Act.**
- **Opposition to measures that undermine or eliminate agencies that provide critical services.**
- **Maintain the independence and budgets for the CFPB, SEC, CFTC and get CFPB back to working with a full staff to protect American consumers.**



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PREVENTING THE POLITICIZATION OF THE CIVIL SERVICE BY DEFENDING WORKPLACE RIGHTS

A merit-based, nonpartisan civil service is the backbone of our federal government. It is imperative that career civil servants charged with implementing complex federal programs on behalf of the American people can continue to do their work with dedication and skill, regardless of changes in elected leadership.

Right now, the nonpartisan civil service is under attack. Every day there are new executive actions or threats of executive actions aimed at shuttering agencies, firing a significant number of federal employees, or making the federal workplace so toxic that employees will want to resign. Proposals to reinforce these actions have also been introduced in Congress. While some of these actions are targeted at undermining government services and Americans' faith in government, others are designed to make it easier to fire federal employees without thought to how such actions could adversely impact the services that Americans rely on or out of a desire to prevent employees from exposing government wrongdoing. Regardless of the justification for these hostile actions, the end result is that the most talented and skilled individuals who are needed to address the challenges facing this country will either lose their jobs, look for employment elsewhere or be coerced into staying silent and refraining from speaking up and giving their expert opinion and advice on government action out of fear of retaliation. This hurts not only the dedicated federal employees but all Americans.

Efforts to eliminate or restrict collective bargaining and due process rights for federal employees undermines the work of the federal government. If successful, these efforts would return the civil service to the dysfunctional "spoils system" of the past, driven by patronage and political favoritism rather than ability and merit. Federal employee unions work every day to ensure that workers are treated with dignity and respect; that they are provided with the resources to do their jobs and have safe working conditions; that they have a voice in the workplace and are treated fairly. Having a union allows employees to focus on doing their job serving the American people instead of worrying about discriminatory or retaliatory action. In the federal government, unions are able to assist employees by using official time, which was created as part of the government's labor-management system since in the federal sector there is no requirement that an individual join and pay dues to a union, but federal unions are required to represent every individual in a bargaining unit, whether or not they choose to pay dues.

Employees' due process rights are also under attack, with continued efforts to make employees at-will, allowing employees to be fired, as per one bill introduced last congress, for "good cause, bad cause, or no cause at all." There is also legislation to codify an executive order creating a new Schedule Policy/Career in the excepted service, which could transfer tens of thousands of employees to this new category in the excepted service and strip them of their civil service and due process protections making it easier to fire them at will.

While these proposals are obvious ways to undermine or eliminate the nonpartisan career civil service, other proposals, which may at first appear innocuous, are designed to accomplish the same goal. For example, efforts to relocate federal agencies and staff are often presented as a way to improve the delivery of services or reduce costs, but instead are backhanded ways to force employees to choose

between uprooting their families and their lives to move across the country to keep their job or voluntarily quitting, allowing agencies to eliminate large numbers of federal employees as one former political appointee noted was something they had wanted, but were unable to do for years.

These anti-worker proposals will detrimentally impact federal employees and the delivery of government services, but efforts to terrorize employees and create a toxic work environment will have the same result. Over the past year, employees have faced a barrage of notices urging them to resign or risk being laid off in the future, they have seen new hires lose their jobs, they have watched as federal workers at other agencies are told to cease operations while leadership works to eliminate that agency. Meanwhile, despite the clear benefits of telework such as saving taxpayer dollars, increasing productivity, improving recruitment and retention, and helping the environment, there have been legislative and executive branch actions to roll back telework at many federal agencies, even in violation of employee collective bargaining agreements. Employees who were hired as full-time remote workers have been assigned offices where they have never worked far away from their home and have been told to leave their families behind and report to the taxpayer-funded leased office space. In other agencies, management previously reduced its leased office space, saving the taxpayers millions of dollars, and employees are now being forced to work report to the now cramped spaces which harms productivity.

Action is needed to ensure that the federal government can continue to provide the services that Americans rely on, and this requires Congress to protect federal employees, prevent mass firings, preserve the nonpartisan career civil service, and ensure that the administration cannot undermine federal employee due process and collective bargaining rights.

NTEU urges:

- **Opposition to efforts to eliminate agencies, fire or coerce federal workers to quit, or other actions creating a toxic workplace.**
- **Support for a professional, nonpartisan civil service with robust collective bargaining and due process rights to prevent politicization of the civil service and to protect whistleblowers.**
- **Support for the Protect America's Workforce Act, H.R. 2550/S. 2837, which would overturn President Trump's Executive Order eliminating union rights for groups of federal employees.**
- **Support for the Saving the Civil Service Act, H.R. 492/S. 134, which would prevent the president from establishing a Schedule Policy/Career scheme.**
- **Opposition to anti-worker proposals seeking to eliminate or weaken collective bargaining rights for federal workers (S. 1006), impede the ability of unions to operate (H.R. 2174/S. 1597, H.R. 1210/S. 511, H.R. 2676/S. 1313), or that fail to protect workers from arbitrary or unfair job actions (H.R. 5750, H.R. 687/S. 662).**
- **Support for efforts to ensure that agencies bargain in good faith and honor collective bargaining agreements.**
- **Support for the COST of Relocations Act, H.R. 2470/S. 1171, which requires agencies to produce a public cost-benefit analysis before forcibly relocating more than 5% or 100 employees to new locations.**
- **Treating federal employees with dignity and respect.**



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PREVENTING THE POLITICIZATION OF THE CIVIL SERVICE BY PROTECTING FEDERAL EMPLOYEE PAY AND BENEFITS

Competitive pay and benefits help ensure a professional, skilled workforce is on board administering our nation's laws and programs. Federal employees — who live and work in every state and congressional district across the country — serve as scientists, accountants, customer service representatives, park rangers, law enforcement officers and more, providing critical services for our nation and the American people. The federal government must provide competitive pay and benefits to recruit and retain talented employees.

Under the Federal Employees Pay Comparability Act of 1990 (FEPCA) (P.L. 101-509), federal white-collar employees should receive an annual, across-the-board pay adjustment as well as increases in locality pay rates, effective in January of each year. The annual pay adjustment is calculated based on the Employment Cost Index (ECI), which measures changes in private sector wages and salaries. Because of the significant disparity between public and private sector salaries, whereby private sector workers on average make 24.72% more than federal employees in comparable jobs, NTEU has endorsed legislation aimed at giving all federal employees a fair pay raise. This legislation, the FAIR Act (H.R. 7480/S. 3823), calls for an average 4.1% pay raise for calendar year 2027, which is in line with the amount called for under FEPCA. Recently, the President decided to provide federal employees a modest and below market pay increase that fails to keep up with inflation while providing higher market-based increases for members of the military and a matching increase for select groups of federal workers. And while we support these employees receiving an increase in pay, such inequities risk politicizing the workforce to curry favor for higher pay, lower morale and jeopardize the ability of the federal government to recruit and retain skilled employees in critical positions and throughout the federal government. As such, NTEU also supports introducing legislation to ensure that all federal workers and service members receive the same annual average pay increase.

Protecting federal employees' benefits is essential to recruiting and retaining a skilled workforce. Most federal employees are covered under the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) for retirement. Unlike many state retirement systems, **FERS is fully funded and financially sound with no unfunded liability.** However, since 2010, Congress has twice increased employee contributions to FERS, essentially cutting take-home pay for those hired after 2012 and creating inequities among employees. And some in Congress have proposed additional pay cuts by increasing retirement contributions for employees as well as cuts to retirement benefits in order to address deficit concerns. Last year, NTEU successfully fought off multiple attempts to raise FERS contributions, eliminate the FERS supplemental, and change annuity calculations as part of the budget reconciliation legislation. Such attacks will continue, including those targeting or exempting employees in certain occupations, but NTEU will continue fighting to protect the benefits that all federal employees have earned as part of their employment contract with the American people and ensure that retirees, whether in FERS or the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS), receive the same COLA increase each year, which is

why we have endorsed the Equal COLA Act (H.R. 491/S. 624).

These earned benefits are vital; they allow federal retirees to live in dignity and have financial security after their time in public service comes to a close. That's why it's essential that the government process retirement applications quickly and efficiently so that retirees may access their benefits without burdensome delays. In order to do this, OPM must get serious about eliminating the current claims backlog, which as of last November had reached approximately 50,000 pending applicants. With each month that passes that this backlog is not addressed, that means more federal retirees are forced to make impossible decisions about how to allocate their limited resources. That's not fair and fundamentally breaks the promise the government has made to its workforce.

At the same time, it is imperative that the federal government provide the retirement benefits promised to the nearly 1,500 Customs and Border Protection Officers (CBPOs) that they have already paid for, expand law enforcement benefits to other employees who work in similar positions, and allow CBPOs on board prior to 2008 to buyback that time for retirement purposes. That's why NTEU has endorsed several bills, including bipartisan legislation, S. 717, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Officer Retirement Technical Corrections Act, which will ensure that CBPOs receive the retirement benefits they were promised. The bill unanimously passed the Senate in December 2025.

Given the amount of student loan debt in the country, programs that offer to repay or forgive an employee's student loan debt are becoming increasingly popular as a way to improve recruitment and retention in the federal government. The Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program is a statutory program created in 2007 to forgive the federal student debt of public employees under stated conditions. Initially, more than 90 percent of applications were denied due to mismanagement of the program. Starting in 2021, important and successful changes were made to improve the program so as of October 2024 over \$74 billion in student loan debt has been forgiven under the revamped program. Under the Trump Administration, disfunction at the Department of Education has prevented the release of updated information. Further, the Administration has proposed not counting service at non-profit employers it disfavors. We ask that Congress monitor the program to ensure it continues to deliver on its promise to America's public servants.

NTEU urges:

- **Opposition to any proposal that would reduce federal employee benefits or make federal employees pay more for the same or reduced benefits.**
- **Opposition to any proposal that would cut or freeze federal employee pay.**
- **Support efforts to reduce OPM's retirement backlog.**
- **Support for the FAIR Act (H.R. 7480/S. 3823) to increase federal pay by an average 4.1%.**
- **Support for the Equal COLA Act (H.R. 491/S. 624), to ensure that FERS retirees receive the same COLA as those who retired under CSRS.**
- **Support for S. 717, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Officer Retirement Technical Corrections Act, to ensure that CBP Officers receive the retirement benefits they were promised.**
- **Support for strengthening the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program.**