

NTEU Bulletin

2021 Legislative Guide

As we settle into 2021, we welcome a new administration and Congress and the opportunities they bring to pursuing our legislative agenda. There is work to do on fighting for a fair federal pay raise, increases in agency budgets and ensuring your benefits are secure. This year, the stakes are higher as the coronavirus continues to spread and workplace health and safety issues are a paramount concern. Through our strong and growing grassroots program, you can add your voice to our effort all year long. Here are our priority issues for 2021:

✓ Fair Pay and Benefits

- ✓ Fighting for fair pay raises that include locality pay
- ✓ Protecting the General Schedule
- ✓ Safeguarding retirement benefits
- ✓ Pressing for a broader paid family leave program

✓ Agency Funding

- ✓ Calling for adequate funding for federal agencies
- ✓ Advocating for the staffing and resources you and your agency need

✓ Workplace Rights and Fairness

- ✓ Protecting basic union rights, due process rights and employee rights to collectively bargain
- ✓ Promoting anti-racist and merit-based procedures in the federal government

✓ COVID-19 Health and Safety

- ✓ Advocating for premium pay for public-facing federal employees
- ✓ Ensuring safety protocols in re-opened workplaces
- ✓ Eliminating out-of-pocket costs for COVID-19 treatment under the FEHBP
- ✓ Pressing for extending administrative leave for caregiving responsibilities

✓ Telework

- ✓ Ensuring the continuation of telework and flexible scheduling options during the pandemic
- ✓ Pushing for expanded telework and flexible scheduling after the pandemic

NTEU's 2021 legislative agenda is set.

Now what?

Find out how you can get involved — without leaving your home.

Worried about COVID-related workplace issues?

Want a fair pay raise in 2022?

Speak up.

Make **YOUR VOICE HEARD** on Capitol Hill in three easy steps:

1. Subscribe to NTEU action alerts
2. Learn about the issues and get pre-written messages and talking points
3. Call and email your members of Congress

It's all on our Legislative Action Center.

VISIT ACTION.NTEU.ORG





Tony Reardon
National President

New Opportunities, New NTEU Agenda

By the time you read this column, we will have endured a violent and deadly assault on our democracy and also sworn in a new president and vice president.

It's disorienting to put those two historic events in the same sentence, but here we are. And both events, coupled with an ongoing pandemic, will shape the new Congress and how our union approaches new challenges and opportunities in 2021.

If you are searching for some stability or normalcy in these turbulent times, I found both in the annual meeting of our Legislative Advisory Committee and the smart, ambitious agenda they recommended for NTEU in 2021. Watching members come together, even virtually, from different agencies in different states, and chart a common course for our union is a powerful reminder that getting to work is itself a much-needed tonic. The issues they chose are now the backbone of our legislative agenda. And with new union- and worker-friendly leadership at both ends of Pennsylvania Ave., we have even more allies lined up ready to help us. Despite having friendlier faces in the White House and on Capitol Hill, achieving our objectives on pay and benefits will require engaged NTEU members to overcome the budget hawks who will seek deficit reductions at federal employees' expense.

First up will be the president's initial 2022 budget proposal, which is due in a few weeks and goes to the heart of one of our central issues: adequate agency funding. While, I don't know what the Biden-Harris budget will say, it most certainly won't come out of the gate with \$54 billion in funding cuts, like the 2017 proposal from the previous administration. We'll be pursuing funding increases at nearly all of our agencies, especially IRS and CBP which continue to have chronic staffing shortages.

For 2022, NTEU has endorsed an average pay raise of 3.2 percent, and there is already legislation introduced to make that happen. Federal employees are still paid less than their private sector counterparts and the 1 percent bump in 2021 — while too low — did serve as a rejection of the last-minute attempt to freeze federal wages.

This is also a good time to emphasize pay equity in our agencies, ridding the system of any remnants of discrimination, and expanding paid parental leave into a more comprehensive paid family leave program.

Other issues on our agenda are borne from the coronavirus pandemic and go to the heart of keeping employees safe.

First, the debate over telework should be over. Federal employees have demonstrated, once and for all, that productivity does not suffer when employees can choose to work from home. In 2020, telework also saved lives, allowing employees to stay home and reducing crowding for those who had to report to the work site. Now is the time to lock in expansive telework benefits and other scheduling flexibilities for eligible employees across government.

Of course, not all federal work is portable, which brings me to one more item on our agenda: workplace health and safety during COVID-19. Those who contract the virus may wind up with huge medical bills — beyond what may be covered by their FEHBP plan — and little or no paid leave left.

And too many employees are at risk because of inadequate cleaning protocols and inconsistent enforcement of the face mask policy. We continue to call for more generous leave policies; health screenings at the workplace; increased access to PPE; agency-provided COVID tests; and *priority* for vaccinations.

NTEU is ready to tackle 2021 head on and honored to advocate for these and all issues important to federal employees.



NTEU MISSION

To organize federal
employees to work
together to ensure that
every federal employee
is treated with dignity
and respect.

NTEU Bulletin

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Fair Pay, Health and Safety Remain Top Priorities in 2021

The start of 2020 felt familiar for federal employees. There were attacks on federal employee pay, benefits and workplace rights that we had come to expect under the previous administration.

But then came something altogether unexpected — a global pandemic. From the start, NTEU advocated for health and safety protocols, maximum telework and expanded flexibilities, and this work continues today.

NTEU is starting 2021 with unfinished business from last year that the union is already working to address with congressional allies and the new administration.

After federal employees received a scant 1 percent increase in 2021, top on NTEU's list is an adequate 2022 pay raise. The union is strongly supporting the FAIR Act that would provide an average 3.2 percent increase next year.

With funding and staffing a persistent issue at agencies like the IRS, NTEU will continue advocating for adequate resources so federal employees can effectively do their jobs.

The paid parental leave program was a monumental win for federal employees, but it's only a first step. NTEU is working to expand the benefit to cover seriously ill

employees and their family members.

With the pandemic surging, NTEU is supporting the additional leave options for federal employees under President Biden's stimulus plan.

The plan calls for additional paid sick and family and medical leave for employees unable to work due to the need to care for a child whose school or childcare provider is closed or to care for a dependent with COVID-19 symptoms.

This includes 12 weeks of paid COVID-related leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act, capped at \$1,400 per week, which would be available to federal employees for the first time, and an extension of the 80 hours of COVID-related emergency paid sick leave that expired in December.

NTEU also continues to press for hazardous duty pay for CBP personnel at the ports and other federal workers at greater risk of exposure to the virus.

Here is a Glance Back at 2020

Despite the challenges, the year ended with a historic new benefit in place and several other key gains for employees.

- ▶ Congress rejected a last-minute attempt to freeze federal pay in 2021 and put in place a 1 percent increase.
- ▶ NTEU fought off White House budget proposals targeting health care, retirement benefits and agency funding.
- ▶ The first-ever paid parental leave program took effect in October after a 20-year fight.
- ▶ After days of uncertainty, the fiscal 2021 omnibus spending bill was signed into law providing most NTEU-represented agencies with higher funding levels and expanding the window for federal employees to repay deferred payroll taxes.
- ▶ Federal employees started 2021 with a higher carryover leave cap, thanks to an NTEU-backed provision in the defense policy bill.

NTEU Members Help Set the 2021 Legislative Course



Last month, 11 NTEU members met over teleconference to review the last session of Congress and survey the current legislative landscape. After a thorough discussion, the group narrowed down the issues and recommended a priority agenda to National President Tony Reardon.

This year's agenda incorporates perennial issues (fair pay and benefits) and some new ones (COVID-19 health and safety) brought on by the pandemic. The priority issues will guide the discussions at the virtual Legislative Grassroots event in March and throughout the year.

The following members of the 2021 Legislative Advisory Committee represent a variety of workplaces and issues, and have a frontline perspective on how potential legislation impacts federal employees:

Elizabeth McPeak
(Chapter 34, IRS Pittsburgh)

Lyn Hilman
(Chapter 52, IRS South Texas)

Alex Berman
(Chapter 71, IRS Philadelphia Campus)

Tonya Morris
(Chapter 73, IRS Cincinnati Campus)
Silvio Capoccia
(Chapter 99, IRS Brookhaven Service Center)

Tracy Benguche
(Chapter 111, CBP LAX)

Hugo Lopez
(Chapter 123, CBP Calexico)

John Padilla
(Chapter 161, CBP Newark)

Latonya McGowan
(Chapter 207, FDIC)

Kim Patton
(Chapter 235, HHS Denver)

Karen Harris
(Chapter 335, CFPB)

In 2021, NTEU's Legislative Conference is going virtual—and you're invited.

Save the date for our

Legislative Grassroots Event

March 16-17

Raising our collective voices in support of important federal workplace issues



