



A bold voice for transportation workers

DEFENDING FEDERAL WORKERS AND PROTECTING THE U.S. POSTAL SERVICE

Congress must end the unprecedented attacks on the rights, jobs, wages and retirement security of federal employees including thousands who directly support and work in our transportation system. Not only do these relentless legislative assaults unfairly target workers simply because of their profile as public sector employees, but they undermine vital infrastructure and services that are so critical to our transportation system and the economy. At the same time, demagogues are demonizing the U.S. Postal Service and its employees and threatening thousands of jobs and pensions. With Americans still suffering in a weakened economy, Congress must focus on protecting and creating jobs, not making scapegoats of federal workers and the services they provide. Transportation labor condemns these deliberate attempts to divide Americans and urges Congress to stop using hard-working federal employees as pawns in the political battles in Washington.

Just this summer, almost 4,000 Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) employees were furloughed during the partial shutdown of the agency when Congress failed to complete a short-term extension of funding. This blatant act of brinkmanship brought vital agency work as well as critical airport and air traffic control safety initiatives to a halt simply because some in Congress wanted to get their way at any cost. Through no fault of their own FAA employees were forced to go without work and pay for two weeks and many that found a way to keep performing their jobs had to pay expenses out of their own pocket. We applaud the Obama Administration for recently announcing that these employees will receive the back-pay they were owed. And we are pleased that Congress and the White House enacted a clean extension that will keep the agency operating through January 31, 2012. But we call on Congress to never hold FAA workers or any federal employee hostage to ideological policy debates.

We are also alarmed that under the guise of deficit reduction, some lawmakers have proposed arbitrary cuts in the number of federal workers without regard for the impact on important government services and middle-class jobs. Hiring freezes, reductions through attrition, mandatory furloughs and lay-offs have all been proposed in recent months. Proponents of these proposals conveniently ignore the fact that the cost of the federal workforce is only a fraction of the federal budget and is not the cause of our long-term debt. Interestingly, many of the lawmakers who demagogue about federal workers and deficits, simultaneously defend a tax code that favors millionaire and billionaires and oppose tax reforms that would reduce the deficit and support the middle-class. In addition, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) estimates that 40 percent of all federal workers will be eligible to retire in 10 years. These anticipated retirements coupled with reductions in personnel, would hamper the federal government's ability to provide important and necessary services to the public, deprive agencies of talented and experienced employees and lead to dangerously low staffing levels at many agencies.

Federal employee health care and retirement benefits are also under attack. Deficit reduction proposals on the table would push health care premiums to an all-time high and would increase employee contributions to the retirement system. Federal employees and retirees would be asked to shoulder increased costs as wages continue to dwindle and millions struggle to make a living on fixed incomes. These proposals would be extremely damaging to employees, retirees and their families. As Congress searches for ways to cut government costs, federal employees should not be forced to shoulder a disproportionate share of the burden.

In addition to the attacks on jobs, wages and benefits, anti-union ideologues are attempting to chip away at core collective bargaining rights. Efforts have been made to bar union officials from conducting limited representational activities and grievance resolutions during specified working hours. So-called “official time” has long been allowed in the federal sector to foster efficient and harmonious labor-management relations and to reduce legal costs and even litigation. We are pleased that the House of Representatives, by a vote of 227 to 195, rejected an amendment to eliminate official time at the Federal Aviation Administration. We will continue to fight to ensure that this statutory right is protected for all federal workers.

Transportation labor is also supporting the workers at the U.S. Postal Service who are mobilizing to ensure the financial solvency of this vital transportation of mail service and to preserve the half million jobs it supports. It must be remembered that the U.S. Postal Service – as a universal provider of mail services to 151 million homes, businesses and P.O. Boxes in every state, city, town and borough – is a major user and supporter of our vast transportation network. The Postal Service employs the largest civilian fleet of vehicles in the world, its drivers cover 1.25 billion miles each year and mail travels by virtually every mode of transport – aircraft, train, truck, boat, ferry, helicopter, street car, subway and hovercraft. TTD affiliated unions have long recognized the importance of a financially stable Postal Service.

There is a solution to the problem but it will require a bipartisan congressional response and Administration support. An unreasonable and onerous law passed in 2006 required the Postal Service to pre-fund future employee health benefits to the tune of \$5.5 billion each year. The Postmaster General has warned that it may have to default on this requirement and the pending financial obligation will threaten the overall operation of the Postal Service. Not only is this requirement not imposed on other government agencies or private sector companies, but the fund to which these payments are due has enough money to cover retiree benefits for the next 20 years. To alleviate this problem, legislation has been introduced in the House of Representatives, H.R. 1351, that would allow for previous overpayments by the Postal Service into the Civil Service Retirement System and the Federal Employee Retirement System to be applied to retiree health care. This would allow the Postal Service to use its own funds (not taxpayer money) to resolve its short-term financial problems and avoid any disruption in vital services. Additionally, it would stabilize the Postal Service’s finances while maintaining Saturday service and the 80,000 good-paying middle-class jobs this service supports. We endorse this legislation as the responsible solution to this financial challenge.

It is time for the 112th Congress to end the demonization of federal workers who perform critically important work for the American people such as ensuring that Americans enjoy the safest transportation system in the world. Making scapegoats of these workers will not fix the economy, put people to work or improve the vital government services delivered daily by the federal workforce. We also call on Congress to pass H.R. 1351 as a necessary step in ensuring the future viability of the U.S. Postal Service, a vital transportation link in our economy.

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