

Hirono Leads Pledge to Fight Unfair Trump Attacks on Federal Workers

14 Senate Democrats add support to resolution outlining “Five Fights for Federal Employees”

Wednesday, February 8, 2017

Senator Mazie Hirono and 14 Senate Democrats unveiled their “Five Fights for Federal Employees,” a proposal to protect current and retired government workers from ideologically motivated attacks from Republicans in Congress and the Trump administration.

This resolution is a statement of principles that Senate Democrats intend to use to fight back against Republican attacks on the federal workforce. These principles include a commitment to defend fair pay and earned benefits, oppose the erosion of essential protections that ensure the professionalism and independence of the civil service, and prevent the outsourcing of essential government functions to private contractors.

“When it comes to federal workers, it’s clear that the Trump administration and Republicans in Congress are operating with alternative facts,” said Senator Hirono. “We have fewer federal workers than we had 50 years ago, and 85 percent of them work outside the beltway. They keep us safe, inspect our food and medicine, and preserve our national parks. They make a big difference in the lives of the people and communities they serve. I will continue to fight against any attempt the administration makes to deny these public servants the benefits they’ve earned.”

Senators Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), Cory Booker (D-N.J.), Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio), Ben Cardin (D-Md.), Tom Carper (D-Del.), Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.), Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), Ed Markey (D-Mass.), Al Franken (D-Minn.), Patty Murray (D-Wash.), Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), Richard Durbin (D-Ill.), Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.), and Mark Warner (D-Va.) cosponsored the resolution.

“Time after time our public servants, mostly middle class and struggling to get by like so many other Americans, have been asked to do more with less resources. They have repeatedly been asked to carry extraordinary burdens, including program cuts and pay freezes, while contributing over \$180 billion (and counting) to deficit reduction – far more than their share,” said Senator Cardin. “Federal workers are patriotic and dedicated public servants in every community across the Nation who simply want to do their jobs on behalf of the American people. They shouldn’t suffer because of partisan gamesmanship.”

“Our federal government cannot function without the hard-working men and women who report to work around the country every day to make sure America is open for business,” said Senator Carper. “Recent rhetoric in Congress and recent executive actions, such as President Trump’s hiring freeze, harm the federal government’s ability to maintain a first-class workforce. They also make it harder for us to invest in improvements that result in better outcomes for less money. I’ve joined Senator Hirono and our colleagues on this important resolution because we

have a responsibility to reject short-sighted political moves and instead focus on efforts that improve and enhance our labor force.”

“Federal workers keep our country and our communities running, keeping us safe, informed, and healthy,” said Senator Durbin. “I’m proud to stand with my colleagues to defend today and every day moving forward the deserved and hard earned pay and benefits of these public servants.”

“Maryland is home to 120,000 civil servants who work every day to secure our borders, provide Social Security and Veterans benefits, and perform life-saving research. We should be supporting their efforts and looking for ways to strengthen our federal workforce, not tearing them down at every turn,” said Senator Van Hollen. “I’m proud to join my colleagues today to say we stand with federal employees and the work they do for all Americans.”

“So many of our federal employees go above and beyond the call of duty every day to keep the government running, usually with little recognition and less fanfare,” said Senator Warner. “We owe it to them to keep our promises. I will strongly oppose any efforts in Congress or by the Executive Branch to diminish the value of their service or deny federal workers access to the fair pay, benefits and protections they have earned.”

A number of prominent labor unions and organizations support this proposal, including AFGE, AFSCME, IFPTE, NARFE, NWSEO, and NTEU.

“On behalf of the 90,000 members of the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE), I support Senator Hirono’s resolution recognizing the contributions of federal employees and pledging to fight against all legislative attacks aimed at our nation’s civilian workers,” said Gregory Junemann, IFPTE President.

“The federal workers here in Hawaii applaud Senator Hirono for leading such a comprehensive resolution that aims to protect our compensation, retirement, health care, and overall worker protections. We thank her for her steadfast support of our work, and our jobs,” said IFPTE Local 121 President, Jamie Hiranaka.

“NARFE applauds Senator Hirono's efforts to recognize the value the federal workforce provides to the American public, and to fight back against actions that would weaken it and scapegoat these hard-working public servants,” said NARFE President Richard G. Thissen.

“The men and women of the National Weather Service work 24 hours a day, every day of the year, to ensure that the American people receive warnings of severe weather. Like many other highly trained scientists and professional employed by the Federal government, they could have chosen less demanding and more highly paid jobs elsewhere, and would be at home on Christmas morning instead of issuing blizzard warnings. They appreciate the recognition that Senator Hirono’s resolution offers,” said Dan Sobien, President of NWSEO.

2017's Five Fights for Federal Employees

Federal agencies operate 24/7 to keep the American people safe, care for our veterans, promote public health, preserve the environment, protect consumers, keep commerce moving and many other tasks.

The approximately 2.1 million¹ people across the country, including over 23,000 in Hawaii,² and around the globe who make up the federal workforce—from doctors, to janitors, and nearly every job in between—ensuring that our government's work for the people is done effectively. There are also 2.6 million³ retired federal workers, including over 25,000 in Hawaii,⁴ who dedicated their careers to public service.

Unfortunately, federal workers and retirees are also a target for ideologically-motivated attacks from Republicans and the Trump Administration that threaten to make our government less effective, a less attractive place to work, and disrespects the people who get up every day to serve the public interest. We cannot let this happen, particularly as many federal employees are aging and looking to retire in the coming years. Though previous Administrations and Congress have worked together to enact initiatives to make our federal workforce more efficient and productive, these latest attacks are unfortunately politically motivated, and will result in irresponsibly undermining the functions of our government.

In 2017, federal workers will need Democrats to stand with them in 5 key fights, across many battlegrounds:

Fight 1: Secure Jobs, Wages, and Health Care

The Fight: Since Republicans took over the House in 2010, federal employees have faced pay and hiring freezes, and their wages haven't kept up with the cost of living or the increasing cost of health care premiums.

President Trump has called for reducing the federal workforce by 10 percent through attrition. House Republicans have supported health care "reforms" that would make the Federal

¹ <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/data-analysis-documentation/federal-employment-reports/reports-publications/sizing-up-the-executive-branch-2015.pdf>

² <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/data-analysis-documentation/federal-employment-reports/reports-publications/federal-civilian-employment/>

³ <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/data-analysis-documentation/federal-employment-reports/reports-publications/federal-civilian-employment/>

⁴ <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/data-analysis-documentation/federal-employment-reports/reports-publications/federal-civilian-employment/>

Employee Health Benefits (FEHB) program a “pilot” for Republican’s plans to voucherize Medicare.

Democrats’ Commitment: Democrats pledge to stand with federal workers and fight for fair wages, oppose efforts to unfairly target federal employees’ health care and other benefits, and work to keep our federal workforce at full strength to do the jobs the American people depend on.

Fight 2: Protecting Earned Retirement Benefits

The Fight: Federal workers have contributed over \$180 billion to reducing the deficit—including through increasing retirement contributions.

Republicans have advocated for further increasing employee contributions, reducing returns on Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) earnings, end retirement flexibility, and fully transition to a “private sector-style 401k” plan.

Unfortunately, we know that relying on these kinds of plans does not always work. Americans do not save nearly enough, and according to the Federal Reserve’s 2015 “Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households” survey, 49 percent of people with 401k-type plans are either “not confident” or only “slightly confident” in their ability to make the right investment decisions, and 52 percent cannot afford to hire investment advice.

Democrats’ Commitment: Democrats pledge to fight against inappropriate increases in contributions, reducing employees’ ability to earn more in the TSP, and efforts to further undermine pension benefits for federal workers.

Fight 3: Opposing Attacks on Civil Service Protections

The Fight: Republicans have used the tragic situation at the Veterans Administration as cover for their ideologically-driven attack on an independent and professional career civil service. Despite passage of targeted reforms that provided more disciplinary flexibility for underperforming employees, Republicans have not let up. The latest actions of the Trump Administration are further threatening the ability to maintain the civil service as a politically independent body.

Democrats’ Commitment: Democrats pledge to continue to fight against efforts to allow politically-motivated and appointed managers to “fire at will” career civil service professionals.

Fight 4: Protecting the Right to Bargain

The Fight: For years, Republican’s ideologically driven opposition to unions has caused them to target federal employee unions to strip away official time and direct deductions. With the

White House and both Chambers of Congress, it is likely that they will pursue these disastrous policies again.

Democrats' Pledge: Official time and direct deductions help to ensure that federal employees have a voice in their workplace, while also ensuring an important balance between union activity and doing their jobs for the American people. Democrats pledge to fight legislation and executive actions that would undermine these critical tools for federal workers.

Fight 5: Preventing Contractors from Taking over Important Federal Functions

The Fight: The activities of the federal government are wide ranging and serve to protect the life and property of the American people. However, for years Republicans have claimed that the “private sector can do it better and more efficiently”—ignoring the fact that certain actions – especially in health and public safety – need to be performed by independent government workers.

Acknowledging that private sector expertise and resources can be helpful in supporting important federal missions, we must protect inherently governmental functions from outsourcing to contractors. These include processes that make the public safe – from inspecting food for disease to making sure our airplanes land safely – and cannot be put in the hands of businesses who make decisions based on their bottom line.

Democrats' Pledge: Democrats pledge to fight against efforts to bid out important governmental functions to contractors without a strong justification that federal capacity is limited, and to fight to protect the independence and oversight of career federal professionals in acquisitions and other decision-making.