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NTEU's Push For Renewed Dialogue With DHS Getting Positive Response From Capitol Hill

Washington, D.C.—Several long-time members of Congress with federal employee and homeland security experience echoed NTEU's call for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to work with employees and their unions in drafting new personnel regulations that are fair and equitable and that will provide a firm underpinning for success of the DHS national security mission.

The statements from Sen. George Voinovich (R-OH), Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-MS) and Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) support the position expressed by National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) President Colleen M. Kelley in the wake of Friday's federal court decision striking down as illegal key provisions of planned new DHS personnel rules.

Kelley said NTEU is willing to begin the process of working with DHS to fashion a personnel system that agency employees can support; she sent a letter to DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff seeking an early meeting on this critical issue.

NTEU is the lead counsel in the case that resulted in the far-reaching and important decision by Judge Rosemary Collyer of U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

In addition to the Voinovich, Thompson and Norton statements, President Kelley said she is confident that other key members of Congress—both Democrats and Republicans—will push for a renewed effort to consensually address the court's finding.

(MORE)

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Among them is Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME). "As chair of the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, Sen. Collins has called all along for a fair and inclusive process," Kelley said. "I look forward to working with her to fashion a system that serves the agency, its employees and the nation."

Sen. Voinovich, meanwhile, urged DHS and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to "work in close partnership with DHS employees and their unions" on such a system. Sen. Voinovich is a member of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee and serves as chairman of its Oversight of Government Management and the Federal Workforce subcommittee.

Rep. Thompson, ranking member of the House Homeland Security Committee, said he is pleased that the court has stepped in to restore vital collective bargaining rights, adding that there is no justification for establishing a system of workplace rules that "runs roughshod over workers' rights to representation and collective bargaining."

And in a separate statement, Del. Norton, a strong supporter of NTEU's efforts to achieve a fair, credible and transparent personnel system in DHS, said the court's decision "should quickly lead to a top to bottom review and total rewrite" of the rules. Norton is a member of both the House Homeland Security and Government Reform Committees.

She said "the court's rejection of the DHS attempt to virtually nullify collective bargaining, coupled with the agency's radical transformation of the (Federal Labor Relations Authority) and its mission, send an important message to (OPM) and the Bush Administration."

NTEU is the largest independent federal union, representing some 150,000 employees in 30 agencies and departments, including more than 14,000 in DHS.