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NTEU Strongly Supports ‘Vital’ Bill Raising Government’s Share of Health Premiums

Washington, D.C.—The head of the nation’s largest independent union of federal workers today offered the union’s strong support for what she described as “critically-important” bipartisan legislation that would boost the government’s share of employee health insurance premiums from today’s average of 72 percent to an average of 80 percent.

The measure, H.R. 1256, was introduced by House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) and Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Va.). Rep. Hoyer told 350 National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) members on Tuesday he was prepared to introduce the legislation. The NTEU members were in Washington for the union’s annual three-day Legislative Conference. Affordable health care for federal employees is one of NTEU’s top legislative priorities for 2007.

“Passage of this bill is vital not only for federal employees, but for their agencies and for our nation as well,” said NTEU President Colleen M. Kelley. “It is outrageous,” she said, “that a growing number of federal employees have to decline to participate in the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) because they can’t afford to do so. If federal workers who serve our country in so many vital ways cannot afford health insurance, shame on us.”

Raising the share of health insurance premiums picked up by the federal government to an average of 80 percent would bring it more in line with what many private sector and state government employers pay.

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Affordable health care is just as important to federal agencies and it is to employees, President Kelley said. “When agencies can’t compete effectively with the private sector for the most qualified employees,” she said, “the American people will be deprived of the quality workers they depend on to deliver the programs they want, need and deserve.”

FEHBP is the largest health insurance plan in the nation, insuring more than nine million federal employees, retirees and their families. But even with its enormous clout, FEHBP has not been able to shield federal workers from sharp increases in health care premiums.

“This legislation will help take the bite out of rising health care costs,” Rep. Hoyer said in a statement.

In his remarks on Tuesday, Rep. Hoyer, who is a long-time, strong supporter of federal employees and their legislative issues, called on the NTEU members to put their “energy behind this bill,” asking them to “make this a substantial priority.”

In addition to its importance in agency recruiting and retention efforts, he noted that a greater government contribution to federal employee health care costs would be one way of “making a difference in (employee) take-home pay”—a reference to the continuing low pay raises for federal workers and members of the military advanced and supported by the administration since it has been in office.

As the largest independent federal union, NTEU represents some 150,000 employees in 30 agencies and departments.

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