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NTEU's Kelley Slams Gingrich Remarks Disparaging Skills of Federal Employees

Washington, D.C.—The leader of the nation's largest independent union of federal employees today issued a sharp rebuke to a former Speaker of the House of Representatives for disparaging remarks he made about the competency and dedication of federal employees.

In a letter to former Speaker Newt Gingrich, President Colleen M. Kelley of the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) took issue with his characterization of the capabilities of employees at both the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and Federal Election Commission (FEC).

"I would have thought that with your years and experience in public service," Kelley wrote, "you would have more respect for federal employees. As president of the union representing the bargaining unit employees at both these agencies, including many of the attorneys, I know what every other informed observer knows—that these public servants are among the hardest working and most competent employees that would be found in any public or private sector organization."

Speaking at a dinner in New Hampshire, Gingrich pushed for elimination of federal campaign finance restrictions, which are enforced by the FEC. He also took a shot at IRS attorneys—who are widely acknowledged to be some of the most accomplished professionals in the legal community—arguing that they do not work long enough hours to be truly effective.

President Kelley pointed out in a letter to Gingrich that federal employees are "highly qualified men and women who have advanced degrees, experience and credentials that equal those in private sector circles."

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The people who enter public service choose to do so because they want to make a contribution, Kelley said, adding that to suggest that they do any less because of that choice, is to display a fundamental misunderstanding of the role of public service.

These are the people who serve our country by advancing the mission that Congress has given them, Kelley wrote. “Along with the other NTEU-represented federal workers such as the Department of Homeland Security employees that protect our border, the Food and Drug Administration employees that ensure the safety of our food, drugs and medical devices, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation employees that guard the soundness of our banks, the employees of the IRS and FEC are dedicated and high skilled. They are a valuable asset to the federal service and it is unfortunate when they are wrongly belittled,” Kelley said.

As for the IRS and FEC specifically, the NTEU leader said that it isn’t any lack of commitment or dedication that makes it difficult for these agencies to fully enforce the laws, it is a lack of resources.

She noted for the former Speaker that just a few months ago, the IRS moved to cut by half the number of attorneys in its Estate and Gift Tax Division despite the fact that, collectively, these employees bring in the highest tax revenue per employee of any IRS division. “Rather than take potshots at these dedicated federal workers,” she wrote, “I urge you to join in NTEU’s call for more staffing and funding to allow these agencies to appropriately fulfill their missions.”

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

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