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NTEU Leader Kelley Sharply Critical of CBP Suggestion to Hire Contractors to Validate Cargo Shippers' Security Plans

Washington, D.C.—The leader of the union representing frontline Customs and Border Protection (CBP) employees today sharply criticized a proposal by a senior CBP official to hire private contractors—rather than expand the present CBP workforce—to ensure the security of nearly half of all merchandise shipped into the United States.

President Colleen M. Kelley of the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) said the proposal, advanced in recent congressional testimony by Jayson Ahearn, CBP assistant commissioner for field operations, “fails to address, in any meaningful sense, the holes in the security net at our nation’s land, air and seaports.”

“Have Department of Homeland Security leaders learned nothing from the Dubai port controversy?” Kelley asked, noting that “outsourcing the port security work of the United States is never the right answer.”

Long before the Dubai port security controversy erupted, President Kelley had been calling for increased funding for staffing and equipment at our nation’s airports, seaports and land border crossings. Kelley has been sharply critical of the proposed fiscal 2007 budget for the Department of

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Kelley Critical of CBP Suggestion on Contractors—Add One

Homeland Security (DHS) which would provide funding for fewer than 100 additional positions at the nation's 317 ports of entry.

A post-Sept. 11 program—the Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (C-TPAT)—is supposed to safeguard our nation's ports by examining critical security measures of shippers who deliver goods to the U.S. The program has been criticized by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and others for not adequately checking the shippers' security efforts.

More than 10,000 companies have applied to the program but CBP's Ahearn told a House subcommittee that there are only 80 CBP employees to validate the security procedures of these companies with plans to hire 40 more inspectors in the near future.

“The entire C-TPAT program needs to be overhauled, but having companies validate each others' security efforts would be a huge step backward in terms of effective security at our ports,” President Kelley said, adding, “The discretion and judgment involved clearly make this an inherently governmental duty. If they need to staff up quickly, it can be done.”

The way to secure air, land and seaports is to staff them with sufficient numbers of high-quality employees, and to provide them with the tools, training and resources they need, Kelley said. Only then can the American people feel confident about port security.

NTEU is the largest independent federal union, representing 150,000 employees in 30 agencies and departments, including 14,000 in CBP—making NTEU the largest union representing CBP employees.