



# The Message

From Our NTEU Chapter to Capitol Hill  
During NTEU's 2005 Legislative Conference

## **Privatization of Federal Jobs**

The threat of this administration sending your job to the private sector is not some abstraction. More and more federal jobs in more and more agencies are being made available to private sector contractors through public-private job competitions. And even when federal employees win a competition, they often do so at a cost that involves a reduced work force. We went to Capitol Hill to argue that members of Congress need to see and understand what the administration refuses to acknowledge—that the positive work process changes that come from job competitions are the result of reengineering efforts by front-line workers. The best course for the nation, we told Congress, is to ensure that federal employees have the tools they need to reengineer their work processes, and that there are mechanisms in place to have employee voices heard in meaningful ways.

## **Social Security Privatization**

We said, in no uncertain terms, that the administration's proposal for diverting money from the Social Security Trust Fund into private accounts goes down the wrong road. The White House proposal injects an unacceptable level of risk into Social Security, threatening serious shortfalls in the Trust Fund. The administration has held up the federal Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) as a model. In one sense, it is a model, but not how the administration means it. TSP participants covered by the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) pay

their full share into Social Security; then, because of TSP, they have the option of also depositing a portion of their paychecks into one of five broadly-based investment funds. That's Social Security-plus, and a much smarter approach. We urged Congress to reject the administration's plan to privatize Social Security.

## **Federal Pay**

Again—and despite growing bipartisan support in Congress for civilian-military pay parity—the administration has proposed a lower 2006 pay raise for federal civilian employees, 2.3 percent, than for members of the military—3.1 percent. We told our members of Congress NTEU supports the higher raise for both groups of federal workers. We especially pointed out that so many federal civilian employees play important roles in defending the nation's security. This looks like a tough fight for 2006, given the record deficits incurred by this administration. Still, NTEU has had good success in educating Congress on the appropriateness of a fair pay raise and the importance of such a raise in agency recruitment and retention efforts. Already, bipartisan resolutions calling for pay parity have been introduced in both the House and Senate.

## **Department of Homeland Security Regulations**

After two years, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) came up with a new personnel system for DHS

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employees that is so one-sided and damaging to employees that NTEU asked a federal court to force the agencies back to the drawing boards. NTEU's input did have some positive effect, rolling back some of the worst of the draft DHS proposals. But the new system removes from DHS employees longstanding statutory rights to bargain collectively. It adversely impacts their due process rights. We stressed that the majority of important conditions of employment are not subject to negotiation—even to impact and implementation bargaining; that management has the unilateral right to issue agency-wide rules that further restrict bargaining and invalidate collective bargaining agreements; and that there would no longer be meaningful independent third-party review of key labor relations matters. Those decisions would be put in the hands of a DHS-controlled internal board.

## Civil Service Flexibilities

The DHS regulations hadn't even been published in the *Federal Register* yet and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) was already saying the administration would be pushing Congress to extend those same flexibilities throughout the government. We told our elected legislators that NTEU at every level would strongly oppose that. For one thing, the rationale that led to the system in DHS—that national security required it—certainly doesn't apply to other agencies.

We made clear NTEU's position that while the union is willing to discuss with agencies their desire for reasonable adjustments in personnel rules, NTEU will reject any significant changes are not supported by a firm business case—or that harm employee rights, including their right to have their voices heard, through their elected representatives, in meaningful ways on issues that affect them.

## Health Care for Federal Workers and Retirees

This pocketbook issue requires constant attention on Capitol Hill, and we presented our arguments to members of Congress that the government's share of health care premiums should be increased to an average of 80 percent from an average of 72 percent. There is pending legislation, which we strongly support, to make that a reality. That would match the benefit commonplace in both the private sector and state and local governments, and would make it easier for the federal government to recruit and retain high-quality workers. We noted that even though the 2005 increase in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) was 7.9 percent—below the double-digit increases of the previous two years—the increase still put a substantial burden on federal employees and retirees, especially given the low pay raises consistently advanced by the administration.

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The National Treasury Employees Union

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