

Public Employees Deserve Our Thanks and Recognition

May 02, 2007

May 7 - 13 is Public Service Recognition Week - an annual week to highlight the dedication and commitment of the more than 20 million public employees throughout the United States. In 1988, Congress passed a proclamation declaring Public Service Recognition Week. From its initial beginnings, Public Service Recognition Week has grown in size and scope.

This year it will be celebrated in all fifty states and in over 1400 cities.

From the men and women who work at Pax River and the police officers who keep our streets and communities safe, to the fire fighters who protect our property and loved ones to the designers of the Mars Pathfinder spacecraft, the public employee workforce is diverse and unique.

This week's celebration reflects the diversity and the high quality of the people who make the public workforce in the United States the best in the world.

In Maryland and throughout the Fifth Congressional District federal employees make up a substantial part of our workforce.

Throughout my career in Congress I have made standing up for federal employees one of my top priorities.

While some Members of Congress have used federal employees as budgetary scapegoats, I fought against the misguided decision to shut down the Federal government and attacks on Federal employee pay and benefits.

It is a fact that men and women who dedicate their lives to public service do so knowing that their compensation will be somewhat lower than the pay for comparable work in the private sector.

However, the lack of adequate pay is challenging the government's ability to recruit top quality candidates to enter these public service jobs.

Recognizing that the federal government was losing its ability to recruit and retain high-quality employees, in 1990 I joined a bipartisan group of Members of Congress to pass the Federal Employee Pay Comparability Act (FEPCA).

The purpose of this act was, over time, to move federal salaries for most white-collar federal employees to comparability with the private-sector.

The law was designed to close the pay gap by 2002 with a 20% adjustment in 1994 and an additional 10% each year thereafter.

Since the passage of FEPCA, residential Administrations have consistently ignored it by not fully implementing the salary adjustments.

Administrations have continually claimed “severe economic conditions” to delay achieving full comparability. With a booming economy, low unemployment and inflation, most economists would disagree today that today’s indicators show “severe economic conditions.”

Federal employees are the lifeblood of this nation, providing a myriad of vital services to millions of Americans. The work undertaken by these talented men and women is critically important, and their compensation needs to fairly reflect that.

In addition to pushing for pay adjustments that duly compensate federal employees for their dedicated service to the nation, I have introduced legislation to increase the government's share of Federal Employee Health Care Benefit Plan (FEHBP) premiums from 72 percent to 80 percent.

As the cost of health care has exploded, the strain on every federal employee's pocket has gotten worse. This legislation will help take the bite out of rising health care costs and make it easier for federal employees to afford quality health care for themselves and their families.

Public employees undertake some of the toughest jobs under the most adverse conditions in the country. They do their jobs and they do them well out of a commitment to public service. President Lyndon Johnson once said “So much of what we achieve as a people depends upon the caliber and the character of the civil service.” This week is an important week to ensure that public employees receive the recognition and appreciation they deserve.