

By Rep. Steny Hoyer

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For federal employees and their families enduring years of frozen pay, a new proposal to cut their pay could not come at a worse time. Those who serve at federal agencies are middle-class workers who never see salaries or bonuses like those on Wall Street. Federal employees have been hurt by the recession just like the rest of America's middle class. They work hard each day in jobs that are frequently high in stress and responsibility but low in pay and benefits. But they know they are making a difference and serving their country.

It's important to remember who we're talking about. These are the nurses who care for our wounded veterans. They are the intelligence analysts who helped track down Osama bin Laden. Federal employees are researchers who help find treatments and cures for some of the deadliest diseases. They are the officers who secure our borders and inspectors who ensure the safety of our food. They make certain that seniors' Medicare claims are processed and that Social Security checks are mailed on time.

That is why I have been dismayed that Republicans are once again asking federal employees to contribute to deficit reduction while refusing to ask the wealthiest Americans to do so. Last year, federal employees stepped up to the plate and accepted a two-year pay freeze, which contributed \$60 billion to deficit reduction. Earlier this year, Republicans again asked them to contribute — this time by increasing the contributions new employees must pay out of pocket into their retirement accounts. To date, federal employees have contributed \$75 billion toward deficit reduction over the next 10 years that they would otherwise have earned through their service.

Thursday, the House Oversight and Government Affairs Committee will meet to consider a new proposal aimed at asking federal employees to contribute yet again. This time, Republicans intend to impose a 5 percent cut on all current employees' take-home pay and a cut to how much the federal government must contribute to their retirement accounts.

While Republicans are asking federal employees and other middle-class workers to bear the burden of deficit reduction, they refuse to ask the wealthy to contribute a single penny, and have even called for new tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires. Just last week, the Republican-controlled House passed a \$46 billion tax break that will disproportionately benefit the best-off among us while making our deficit problem even worse. If that tax break is kept in place over the next 10 years, it could add another \$500 billion to the deficit.

Republicans' priorities are crystal clear, and investing in a top-notch workforce competitive with the private sector is not among them. With so many federal employees in mission-critical jobs set to reach retirement eligibility over the next few years, it has never been more important to ensure our federal agencies can continue to attract the best and brightest who wish to serve.

Setting America's fiscal house in order remains one of the most pressing and difficult national challenges facing Congress, and Democrats are committed to doing our part to reach a solution. That's why we are continuing to push for a comprehensive deficit reduction solution that combines a balance of defense and domestic spending cuts with additional revenues. That House Republicans have instead chosen to rely almost entirely on domestic cuts is unrealistic and irresponsible. This means slashing funding for programs that benefit middle-class and working families as well as those the neediest Americans rely on each day. One of Republicans' top targets, it appears, continues to be those who serve our nation as federal employees.

Federal employees are not responsible for the recession, nor are they the drivers of our debt. Our public workers are dedicated men and women who provide vital services to people throughout the country — and if Republicans continue to treat them unfairly, it will become more and more difficult to recruit and retain the top-quality workforce the American people deserve and need.

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