

WASHINGTON, DC – House Democratic Whip Steny H. Hoyer (MD) addressed members of the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) at the Internal Revenue Service Headquarters in Washington today as part of NTEU's "Labor Recognition Celebration Week." Hoyer touched on key issues for NTEU members including pay parity, federal employee benefits, personnel changes, private sector contracting, and private tax collection.

Attached below are excerpts from Congressman Hoyer's remarks as prepared for delivery.

"There are few functions that are more sensitive or critical to our great nation's well being than the one performed by employees of the Internal Revenue Service. Ensuring our nation has the financial resources it needs to support our troops, combat terrorism, keep our environment clean, and respond with compassion to natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina is a difficult and unenviable task. But it must be done...

"That you perform your jobs in a professional, non-partisan manner is the single greatest protection we that revenue collection, as unpopular as it is, is perceived as fair and honest by Americans...

"Quite frankly, these are not the friendliest of times for federal employees. I am here this afternoon to tell you that I am doing everything I can in Congress to make sure your interests are heard. If ever there was a time for federal employees to be united in a cause, it is now.

"First and most important, we must fight – and defeat – the misguided and reckless proposal to gut the civil service system. I am particularly troubled by the new personnel regulations at the Departments of Homeland security and defense that the administration wants to extend government-wide. The administration's proposed 'Working for America Act' will significantly limit basic employee rights and protections, including collective bargaining rights of employees. We must resist this administration's efforts to weaken collective bargaining rights and civil service protections. These rights and protections are all we have to ensure your work is compensated fairly and performed in a professional, non-partisan manner.

"We must also ensure that federal civilian employees receive the same 3.1 % annual salary adjustment that President Bush has proposed for the military in 2006. President Bush's proposal to provide only 2.3% to federal civilian employees is simply unacceptable. I have

expressed my commitment to “pay parity” and am hopeful we will prevail before the end of the month in achieving it...

"We must also be vigilant on the administration’s outsourcing initiatives. As you know, we have not succeeded in rolling back these initiatives. The good news is our message is beginning to resonate. ‘Competitive outsourcing’ can work only when competition between federal employees and private contractors takes place on a level playing field. I am deeply disturbed, as I know you are that this administration has embarked on a plan to privatize tax collection. Hiring private tax collection agencies on a commission basis to collect revenue is among the most wrong-headed public policy decisions I have seen in my 25 years in Congress. The potential for this ill-conceived plan to lead to abuse is clear and undeniable...

"We must also address the issue of increasing insurance premiums. One of the incentives for working for the federal government is affordable, comprehensive insurance coverage. Earlier this year I introduced H.R. 633 in the House that would control the rising cost of premiums by increasing the government’s contribution to the federal employees health benefits programs. Now more than ever this bill must become law. In September, OPM announced that federal employees and retirees will increase an average of 6.6 percent in 2006.

“While that is one of the lowest increases in recent years, the increase is still too high, outpacing inflation. In fact, the premiums in some plans will increase by as much as 15 percent. H.R. 633 would increase the government’s share of FEHBP premiums to an average of 80 percent from the current average of 72 percent, taking the bite out of the unrelenting climb in the cost of federal health care.

"These are just a handful of the issues confronting us as the year draws to a close. But with your energy and enthusiasm, we can succeed."

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