

**WASHINGTON, DC – Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (MD-5) released the following statement in support of government workers throughout our country, after speaking at the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association (NARFE) Legislative Conference:**

“Whether retired or active, Federal public servants and their service to the American people—whether they are Democrats, Republicans, or Independents—deserve respect. As someone who represents almost 60,000 Federal employees in Maryland’s 5th Congressional District and sees the contributions of public servants on a daily basis, they certainly have mine.

“It’s easy to write off or ridicule Federal employees in the effort to score political points. But I wonder: how many of the people who do that rely on Federal employees to keep watch over our nation’s borders? How many of them rely on Federal employees to keep their food safe and their air clean? From delivering our mail to defending our country, we count on federal employees every day.

“So what I will not abide is anyone disparaging the work they do as a shortcut to solving our nation’s budget problems. And I say that as someone who takes those problems very seriously, who has warned our country about the danger of debt for years. Our debt poses a grave danger to every American’s future and opportunities—and that’s why the work of getting out of debt means shared sacrifice. I believe that public servants have to share that sacrifice—in fact, I know they are sharing it already. But I don’t think they deserve to be scapegoated. In fact, you can tell a great deal about someone’s seriousness on our fiscal challenges from his or her attitude toward public servants—the more that person is willing to scapegoat, the less he or she is willing to get down to the real, hard work.

“I know that work means compromise. Time and again, public servants have been asked to compromise—to compromise their wages, their pensions, their benefits. And time and again, they have stepped up to the plate and said: ‘We understand. We’re ready to do our share.’ That’s what they’re saying in Wisconsin. And instead of meeting their compromise halfway, Republicans are meeting that offer with an ideological plan to strip their right to organize.

“I wish that Republicans would listen to a president from their own party, President Eisenhower. He said: ‘Workers have a right to organize into unions and to bargain collectively with their

employers. And a strong, free labor movement is an invigorating and necessary part of our industrial society.’ But Republicans across the country are rejecting that counsel, just as they’re rejecting compromise.

“Here in Washington, Democrats have said that we’re more than willing to cut spending we don’t need—to cut and compromise. We’ve met Republicans more than halfway. But that’s not enough—and so we see a stark contrast between two approaches to the budget. One approach believes in smart, targeted cuts. The other wants to hit an arbitrary, ideological target—never mind the consequences.

“Here’s how David Brooks explained the contrast last week. A principle of austerity, he said, must be ‘never cut without an evaluation process. Before legislators and governors chop a section of the budget, they should make a list of all the relevant programs. They should grade each option and then start paying for them from the top down. It seems simple, but that is not what is happening. Instead, legislators and administrators are simply cutting on the basis of what’s politically easy and what vaguely seems expendable.’

“Unfortunately, when Congress plays that reckless game, public servants get caught in the middle. That’s bad enough—but what’s worse is that our country’s competitiveness gets caught in the middle. In order to reach an arbitrary target, Republicans have to cut billions in energy and medical research. They have to stop funding 20,000 scientists at the National Science Foundation. They have to kick 200,000 children out of Head Start. They have to put college further out of reach for our sons and daughters. They have to leave our roads, our bridges, and our air traffic control stuck in the last century. They have to stop construction projects in 40 states. In other words, they have to make America a weaker nation—a nation that is out-educated, out-innovated, and out-built by its competitors.

“That’s not an abstract threat—the harms will be felt in communities across our country. The Economic Policy Institute estimates the damage of the Republican spending plan at 800,000 jobs in the public and private sectors. Mark Zandi, the chief economist at Moody’s analytics, who advised Sen. McCain’s presidential campaign, estimates the damage at 700,000 jobs. Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke says that Republican plans will cost our country ‘a couple hundred thousand jobs.’

“Why take that path? Because that path—and the scapegoating of public servants that so often goes along with it—is politically easier than the real work of getting out of debt.

“I urge Republicans to stop trying to solve our problems by focusing on 14% of the federal budget. And instead, take on the real challenges, together, like Ronald Reagan and Tip O’Neill did. We need to work together to pass deficit-reducing tax reform, which will help get our budget under control, and will help families and businesses make economic decisions based on common sense, not tax loopholes. We need to work together to scrutinize the defense budget for spending that doesn’t make us safer. And we need to take a hard look at our entitlement programs, so that they can bring as much assurance to the next generation, and the one after that, as they bring to this one.

“None of that will be politically easy. But it has these important virtues: it can solve our real problem—and it can do so without crippling our competitiveness.

“I hope that Members of Congress stop turning Americans against one another for political gain. I hope that Congress starts making hard choices and putting our country’s future first—like public servants put our country’s future first, every day.”