

Federal Employees Are Taking It on the Chin

NASA civil servant employees should be aware, and perhaps even alarmed, at some of the recent actions taken or planned by the federal government, as well as some of the pressing issues that are being ignored, concerning the federal workforce. Your union is speaking out on these issues and lobbying to preserve federal workers' rights. If you have concerns about these or other issues, please let us know.

Possibly the biggest financial impact on federal workers comes from the reductions in retirement benefits in the proposed fiscal 2018 budget. The 2018 budget proposal will require federal employees to increase their retirement out-of-pocket contributions. Other proposals include basing retirement benefits on the last five years of salary in place of the current three years (effectively lowering benefits), doing away with or reducing cost-of-living adjustments, and eliminating supplementary payments for early retirees. Although, the full package is not expected to make it through Congress unscathed, it still of concern and bears watching.

Harbingers of plans to undermine civil service protections in all branches of government are already evident in proposed and recently signed laws related to the Veterans Administration, which make it much easier to discipline and fire employees, and make it more difficult to appeal such actions, removing long-standing job protections for civil service employees. These measures appear to be serving as a blueprint for the full federal government, and measures to expand these laws to cover the entire civil service workforce are already being discussed.

Meanwhile, inaction on some important issues is also hurting federal workers across all agencies. The current administration is lagging far behind in nominations to fill key posts in federal agencies, and has actually filled about a quarter of the positions compared to previous administrations at this stage. The bottom line for federal employees is that most agencies do not yet have the leadership structure in place to guide the agency's mission and provide long-term stability. Understaffing at this level negatively affects operations in a practical sense, but also contributes to diminished employee morale. The nomination of U.S. Representative Jim Bridenstine as NASA Administrator has just been announced. Pending Bridenstine's confirmation, Robert Lightfoot will step down after 7 months as Acting Administrator."

We understand that some federal employees may agree with some of these actions from a political or ideological viewpoint, regardless of the effect on you personally, or on your fellow federal employees. Note that a portion of union dues go to the general fund of the parent organization, the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers, and the IFPTE paid staff includes a legislative director who speaks to the legislative and executive branches about issues affecting union members. Dues are not used to support candidates. GESTA officers also spend a small amount of time joining with other union officers and members to learn more about issues and speak with legislators about these issues, with the expenditure of a small amount of dues-based money for a registration fee to cover the education part.

These are a few of the most impactful actions being considered for federal civil servants. There are many other actions that have been or are being taken which impact our rights and our ability to do our

Federal Employees Are Taking It on the Chin

jobs effectively. If these concern you and you are worried about the erosion of your rights in the workplace, consider becoming a dues paying member of your union, the Goddard Engineers, Scientists & Technicians Association (GESTA). GESTA is a membership organization, and while we attempt to represent all 1,676 members of our two bargaining units, we tend to represent primarily the views of active, dues-paying members, which is a fraction of that total. Only dues-paying members are able to serve as officers, vote on matters of policy, approve representatives to IFPTE conventions, or serve on or approve members of negotiating committees.