



**Statement to the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service  
June 26, 2019**

National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service  
2530 Crystal Drive  
Suite 1000, Box #63  
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Commissioners:

As National President of the National Treasury Employees Union, which represents approximately 150,000 federal employees in 33 agencies, I want to thank you for your service on the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service and for taking the time to work through the challenges impacting individuals seeking a career serving their country. I am writing to share my comments on the proposals laid out and discussed in the Staff Memorandum on Public Service that was the topic of two recent hearings held at the Partnership for Public Service.

Improving Basic Hiring Processes

NTEU believes in and strongly supports the Merit System Principles, which ensure that individuals are hired to work for the federal government based on merit, not on their race, age, gender, political views, or relationship with the hiring official. NTEU also fully supports the application of veteran's preference in hiring decisions as part of our obligation to help those who have worked so hard to defend our nation and our freedom. At the same time, NTEU recognizes that the process used to hire new employees can be onerous. However, we have seen that some of the things that make the process onerous are due to complicated extra steps that agencies include in their hiring process out of long-standing practice or fear of future litigation—rather than requirements directly tied to the statute or court decisions. Furthermore, despite ongoing congressional efforts to provide additional flexibilities to agencies to improve the hiring process and the time it takes to hire a new employee, agencies rarely use any of the multiple tools available to them. A sustained effort to provide comprehensive training to all agency Human Resources (HR) professionals and opportunities for HR professionals in various agencies, not just the Chief Human Capital Officers, to meet with each other and experts at the Office of Personnel Management and share best practices and challenges they are facing are critical to success.

Your proposals to modernize the recruiting, application, and candidate assessment processes have merit, especially proposals to ensure that hiring managers and subject-matter experts are part of the hiring process from the beginning and that 35 percent of a supervisor's performance evaluation be based on personnel management, recruiting, and human capital responsibilities. However, sometimes the sheer volume of applications received by a vacancy

announcement can leave HR offices overwhelmed, necessitating the use of some sort of assessment tool to help manage the selection process.

I also appreciate your proposals to establish and revitalize existing programs to build a pipeline for recent graduates to enter public service. While there is a serious lack of young people entering the federal government, revitalizing programs like the Presidential Management Fellows program requires actual jobs to be available after the fellows complete the program. Moreover, while a Public Service Corps that would provide money, clearances and employment in return for a service commitment is noble, as is the idea of a Public Service Academy, the reality is that federal employees have endured hiring freezes and pay freezes and cuts to agency budgets for years. As a result, some of our members must buy their own pens and paper because of their agency's limited budget for supplies. The question then turns to how such programs will be funded in this current fiscal climate.

Regarding proposals for expanding noncompetitive eligibility for groups of individuals, history has shown agencies to have abused such flexibility and using those programs as the only method of hiring, which undermined veterans' preference and civil service protections. Without additional details, NTEU does not have a full position on these proposals but urges caution and encourages consideration of the issues we have raised as you work to finalize your recommendations on improving the hiring process.

### Critical Skills and Benefits

NTEU fully supports efforts to make the federal government an employer of choice—one that is competitive with the private sector for top talent. However, we remain opposed to efforts by some to cut benefits in a “race to the bottom.” Recent administration proposals on employee pay, retirement, and health care, among other benefits, would result in reduced pay and coverage. We have similar concerns about proposals put forward in your memorandum. For example, while NTEU has been on the forefront in championing paid parental and family leave, it should not be gained at the expense of one's retirement. A federal pension – a guaranteed income not dependent on the stock market—may not be as popular a benefit for employers in the private sector, but its fall from use is one of the leading contributors to the retirement insecurity in this country. And while we are intrigued by the proposal to offer a cafeteria plan of certain benefits, such as flexible spending accounts, health savings accounts, and life, dental, vision and disability-income insurance, we are concerned about the costs associated with the proposal and the trade-offs that may be required for employees for this benefit, especially since current dental and vision insurance costs are fully paid by the employee.

The staff memorandum also proposes the establishment of a new civil service personnel system to accommodate the modern workforce. While we appreciate that it is tempting to throw out the old system and start over, in general, we believe that the General Schedule still works well. It provides a merit system and transparent policies and protections. It provides greater parity in pay between men and women than the private sector and takes into account the numerous locations where federal employees work and the unique jobs that they perform. We agree that paid leave and flexible time off are good goals to attract a younger workforce, but Title 5 does not need to be overhauled to reach those goals.

We agree that some of the problems with the current personnel system that are discussed in the staff memorandum do exist. However, NTEU simply does not believe that throwing out the current system is a solution to this problem. Instead of attacking federal workers as bureaucrats and attempting to cut their pay and benefits while limiting agency funding, Congress and the administration could highlight the important services provided by federal employees and work to make the federal government a more attractive place to work. We look forward to working with you in support of proposals to make that happen.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Anthony M. Reardon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Anthony M. Reardon  
National President