Kilmer, Cole Introduce Bipartisan Bill to Help Shipyard Workers, Other Federal Workers Retire On-Time

Washington, D.C. - Today, Representatives Derek Kilmer (D-WA) and Tom Cole (R-OK) introduced the Federal Retirement Fairness Act. This bill ensures that federal employees who started their careers as temporary workers – meaning they did not have the ability to make retirement contributions – are granted the opportunity to make catch-up retirement contributions so that they can retire on time. Without this option, workers are faced with an unfair choice: leave the federal service without full retirement benefits or work longer than expected to obtain full retirement benefits.

“Many federal employees begin their careers in temporary positions before transitioning to permanent status – so we need to have their backs,” said Rep. Kilmer. “This bill will ensure that all federal workers, from the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard and beyond, have the opportunity to retire at the same time, regardless of how they started their careers.”

“I am proud to join in introducing the Federal Retirement Fairness Act that allows federal workers, first hired under temporary status, to receive retirement credit for the entirety of their government service,” said Rep. Cole. “The existing policy provides no benefit to federal employees or the federal government, but the buy-back option gives workers additional credit toward retirement which is an option they currently do not have available.”

Prior to 1989, the Office of Personnel Management allowed federal employees to make catch-up payments to buy-back years during which they did not contribute to their retirement accounts. This authority was phased out when the government switched to a new federal employee retirement system.

Today, workers at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, at Tinker Air Force Base, and at federal facilities across the country who started as temporary employees and then converted to full-time employment, are now finding that they may have to work years longer than their peers to receive the same retirement benefits. The Federal Retirement Fairness Act would restore the authorities that allow employees hired since 1989 to buy-back the time they served as temporary federal employees under the same terms that were in place prior to 1989.

It is important that all federal employees have the freedom of choice to retire on time after their years of service if they have made the necessary contributions to do so. This bill ensures that all employees, regardless of their initial hiring status, are granted the same opportunity for the same amount of work.

The Federal Retirement Fairness Act is supported by the International Federation of Professional & Technical Engineers (IFPTE), National Federation of Federal Employees, National Federation of Federal Employees Forest Service Council, Federal Managers Association (FMA), National Rural Letter Carriers’ Association, American Federation of Government Employees AFL-CIO, and National Association of Letter Carriers AFL-CIO.
“IFPTE applauds both Representatives Kilmer and Cole for introducing this legislation, as it provides long overdue pension parity to those federal workers who failed to receive proper pension credit for their federal service,” said Matt Biggs, Secretary-Treasurer of the International Federation of Professional & Technical Engineers (IFPTE). “This bill recognizes that regardless of an employee's status as temporary or permanent, workers should not be unjustly penalized. IFPTE is pleased to endorse this bill.”

“AFGE thanks Representative Kilmer and Representative Cole for their leadership in introducing the ‘Federal Retirement Fairness Act,’” said J. David Cox, National President of the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO. “This legislation will ensure that temporary employees within the federal government receive creditable service under the Federal Employees Retirement System and simultaneously create some compensation equity for employees with temporary assignments. Unstable, temporary employment is bad enough without the added insult of inferior compensation.”

“Seasonal and temporary federal employees who answer the call of duty deserve the same level of respect as permanent employees who often work alongside each other,” said Randy Erwin, President of the National Federation of Federal Employees. “It is unconscionable to ignore their temporary or seasonal labor upon becoming permanent employees. It is like saying those months or years did not matter. If they put the time in, they deserve the option to have it counted toward retirement.”

“With so many Forest Service employees spending years working “temporary” jobs before ultimately getting hired into a permanent position, this legislation is an important step towards equity and adequate retirement income for citizens who have given years of service to their country,” said Melissa Baumann, President of the National Federation of Federal Employees Forest Service Council.

“FMA strongly endorses Representatives Kilmer and Cole’s leadership and bipartisan effort to allow FERS employees to buy back temporary time,” said Renee Johnson, National President of the Federal Managers Association. “Our members fully understand they would be responsible to bear the bulk of the costs, but welcome the opportunity to buy back this time and be rewarded for their years of hard work. This solution would provide an excellent option for many feds, especially those who were ‘temporary’ for many years. We urge Congress to consider and pass this legislation.”

"The National Rural Letter Carriers' Association fully supports the Federal Retirement Fairness Act, which will give rural letter carriers who served as relief employees after December 31, 1988, the opportunity to buy back credit for service, something we have been advocating for a very long time,” said Ronnie Stutts, President of the National Rural Letter Carriers’ Association. “We want to thank Congressman Kilmer and Congressman Cole for introducing this long-awaited legislation for our membership."

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