

DECEMBER 4, 2002

MEMBERS OF CONGRESS EXPRESS OUTRAGE AT BUSH ADMINISTRATION LATEST ASSAULT ON MIDDLE AND LOWER- INCOME FEDERAL WORKERS

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) joined eighty-three members of Congress in signing a letter to President Bush opposing his action to cut the wages of middle and lower-income federal employees. Bush announced his latest assault on federal workers while reinstating the ethically-questionable policy of cash bonuses to top political appointees and pushing to expand his tax cuts for the wealthy.

Earlier this year, Congress passed legislation giving federal workers a 4.1% wage increase. President Bush used his authority to reduce it to 3.1%, citing the cost of the war on terrorism.

In the letter, which was organized by U.S. Representative George Miller (D-CA), the members wrote, "*it is highly inappropriate to take advantage of federal employees, especially at a time when they are playing a crucial and ever expanding role in fighting the very war on terrorism whose cost, you assert, necessitates the reduction of federal workers' pay.*"

They added, "*We object to cutting the pay of those who are playing an important role in our national security and daily functions of government, most of them middle-income Americans, while you do not believe in asking America's most wealthy citizens to make any sacrifice at all. Annual base pay for civilian federal employees ranges from \$14,757 to \$107,357, with the average employee earning \$45,000 per year. The majority of your tax cuts benefit those earning \$518,000 or more per year. We question the fairness of cutting the pay of these federal workers instead of freezing or reducing your 2001 tax cut that primarily benefits the wealthiest one percent of Americans.*"

Below is the text of the letter to President Bush:

December 4, 2002

Honorable George W. Bush
President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Mr. President,

We are writing to express our strongest objections to your decision to cut the pay of federal employees.

On November 27, 2002, you informed Congress that due to the cost of fighting terrorism the government could not afford the increase in pay federal workers had been granted by law. In your letter, you wrote, "A national emergency has existed since September 11, 2001. Full statutory civilian pay increases in 2003 would interfere with our Nation's ability to pursue the war on terrorism." The cost of the pay increase "would threaten our efforts against terrorism or force deep cuts in discretionary spending or Federal employment to stay within budget. Neither outcome is acceptable."

It is convenient for some to mistreat the federal workforce as an ideological whipping post of "big government," and you have already made two strikes against them in the last month -- first when you took away the collective bargaining rights of 130,000 federal employees who will work on homeland security and then again when you floated the idea of privatizing 850,000 federal jobs. But it is highly inappropriate to take advantage of federal employees, especially at a time when they are playing a crucial and ever expanding role in fighting the very war on terrorism whose cost, you assert, necessitates the reduction of federal workers' pay.

We are also alarmed that less than one week after you announced you are cutting federal employees' pay, it was revealed today that your Administration will issue financial bonuses to your top political appointees, a practice that was discontinued nearly 10 years ago because of ethical concerns.

We object to cutting the pay of those who are playing an important role in our national security and daily functions of government, most of them middle-income Americans, while you do not believe in asking America's most wealthy citizens to make any sacrifice at all. Annual base pay for civilian federal employees ranges from \$14,757 to \$107,357, with the average employee earning \$45,000 per year. The majority of your tax cuts benefit those earning \$518,000 or more per year. We question the fairness of cutting the pay of these federal workers instead of freezing or reducing your 2001 tax cut that primarily benefits the wealthiest one percent of Americans.

Mr. President, at a news conference on February 2, 2001, you said that our nation could afford your \$1.3 trillion, ten-year tax cut, saying, "This is a well-planned-out tax relief package that addresses the concerns of working Americans. It is needed; it is necessary; it will make a very positive difference in the lives of people who pay taxes. And our country can afford it."

Apparently, we cannot afford it.

You did not say that there was a "national emergency" when, regardless of one's view of

their merits, you supported additional tax cuts this year in Congress or when you signed the \$82 billion farm bill into law in May. But when it comes to adequately compensating federal workers engaged in fighting the war on terrorism and other vital functions of government, you assert we must make cuts.

Surely there is one feature of the tax cut that benefits the most affluent Americans that could be delayed, frozen or repealed in order to allow the locality pay increase for federal workers to go into effect. If our Nation cannot meet its obligations because of the war on terrorism, please announce that to the public so that all Americans can know the real state of affairs in this country and so that Congress and the Administration can have an open and fair debate about what changes are needed to meet our obligations. But do not cut the pay for those in the middle while failing to ask those at the top to contribute to the cost of responding to our national emergency.

We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

84 Members of Congress

George Miller, Tammy Baldwin, Ed Markey, Alcee Hastings, Donna Christensen, Mike Honda, Frank Pallone, Edolphus Towns, Steve Israel, Jan Schakowsky, Barbara Lee, Neil Abercrombie, Joe Baca, Dennis Kucinich, Rob Andrews, Bill Pascrell, Robert Scott, Eleanor Holmes Norton, Michael McNulty, Chaka Fattah, Carrie Meek, Sam Farr, Jesse Jackson Jr., Eliot Engel, Lynn Woolsey, Susan Davis, Betty McCollum, Jim McDermott, Jose Serrano, Donald Payne, Lucille Roybal-Allard, Danny Davis, Jim McGovern, Gary Ackerman, Thomas Allen, Jay Inslee, Jerrold Nadler, Sherrod Brown, Brian Baird, John Conyers Jr., Robert Wexler, Maurice Hinchey, Rosa DeLauro, Charles Rangel, Albert Wynn, Dale Kildee, Henry Waxman, Elijah Cummings, Charles Gonzalez, Nick Rahall, Diana DeGette, Steny Hoyer, Julia Carson, Brad Sherman, James Langevin, Major Owens, Robert Brady, James Moran, David Price, Stephanie Tubbs-Jones, Corrine Brown, Karen McCarthy, Ciro Rodriguez, Barney Frank, John Conyers, Peter DeFazio, Silvestre Reyes, Maxine Waters, Bob Filner, Bobby Rush, Carolyn Kilpatrick, Melvin Watt, Jerrold Nadler, Pete Stark, Mark Udall, John Dingell, Hilda Solis, William Coyne, Howard Berman, John Tierney, Nydia Velazquez, Joe Crowley, Steven Rothman, William Lacy Clay, Sheila Jackson-Lee, and Gary Ackerman.