

Statement of
RANDY ERWIN
NATIONAL PRESIDENT
NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES, IAMAW, AFL-CIO
Before the
Subcommittee on Government Operations
U.S. House of Representatives
Hearing on The Future of Federal Work
December 1, 2021

Chairman Connolly, Ranking Member Hice, and Members of the Subcommittee:

As national president of the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE), and on behalf of the approximately 110,000 federal workers we represent throughout the United States, we thank you for holding a hearing to discuss the future of federal civil service and to debate the Building the Next Generation of Federal Employees Act (“NextGenFeds”), legislation that NFFE strongly supports.

The federal workforce must be proactive in planning for the next generation of civilian employees and adjust to our country’s dynamic populace. Right now, less than 7% of federal employees are under the age of 30. In contrast, the private sector has nearly a quarter of its workforce of the same age. Further, almost a third of government employees have reached or are nearing retirement age. Thus, it is necessary that the federal government take strategic action in its recruitment and hiring programs so that the civil service can continue to support our nation every day and carry out its critical missions.

It is also essential that our federal workforce be comprised of and led by workers that are representative of the country as a whole. Although people of color make up nearly half of the civilian workforce, their white co-workers hold two-thirds of senior level positions and more than three-fourths of the Senior Executive Service. Moreover, nearly 60% of the civil service are women, but only 36% of the Senior Executive Service are women.

To address these inequities, it is necessary that the federal government establishes robust internship programs to attract candidates that are younger and more diverse, both culturally and politically. These goals can be achieved through the NextGenFeds Act. The legislation will allow the Office of Personnel Management to create a comprehensive Federal Internship and Fellowship Center, led by an apolitical director. Through these programs, interns and fellows will receive hiring points, providing them an earned boost when applying for permanent federal employment after the completion of their internship or fellowship.

As a particularity market-savvy enhancement to federal internships, NFFE endorses the move to provide for a living wage to interns and fellows. Given the amount of debt incurred by students to pay for their educations, and given the increasing cost of living, a living wage is critical to ensure that federal internships and fellows programs are a financially accessible choice for all graduates, not just for students who can “afford” a non-paying internship. Further, the

NextGenFeds Act will permit graduates of the Jobs Corps program to be eligible for federal internships, helping young people from disadvantaged communities establish a stable career path in civil service.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government has learned the value of online platforms and telework. The NextGenFeds Act will direct OPM to build an online internship and fellowship platform, allowing for a streamlined process for candidates to find, learn about, and apply for scholarships, internships, and fellowships across all government agencies. In the same vein, the NextGenFeds legislation will promote increased productivity in the federal workforce through teleworking programs that were promoted and calibrated to efficiency during the pandemic.

While telework is not always possible depending on the position, utilizing remote work more efficiently can open doors to hire well-qualified candidates that were previously unreachable geographically or because of physical limitations. Plus, telework has the potential to decrease the environmental footprint of the civil service and decrease spending on unnecessary office space.

As a model employer, the federal government must also take steps to increase diversity within the civilian workforce and offer a safe, inclusive workplace for people of all races, religions, genders, and sexual orientations. The NextGenFeds Act will promote and leverage federal internships and fellowships among diverse participants, allowing them to thrive early on in their careers and preparing them for long term success as civil servants.

In closing, I wish to again thank the Subcommittee for their interest in preparing and adapting the federal workforce to meet the needs of the future. NFFE looks forward to working with the subcommittee on these matters to build a modern, diverse, and well-equipped federal civil service.