



# NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES

Affiliated with the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers



## NFFE News Release

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Contact: Matt Dorsey

Phone: (202) 216-4451

### **New Bill Aims to Needlessly Curtail Collective Bargaining Rights on Return-to-Office Plans, End Telework for Federal Agencies**

**Washington, D.C.** – Today, the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE) is opposing legislation introduced by Senators Roger Wicker (R-MS), Mark Kelly (D-AZ), Chuck Grassley (R-IA), and Martin Heinrich (D-NM) that seeks to bypass current collective bargaining agreements and interfere with ongoing negotiations between federal labor unions and agency management regarding return-to-work plans for federal employees. The bill, entitled the RETURN Act, calls for agencies to submit a plan within 30 days of the bill’s passage to resume full operations in person and end remote work. The new plans must cover topics already addressed in existing agreements such as performance measurement, telework eligibility, and pandemic protocols. If an agency submits a plan that conflicts with existing bargaining agreements, the legislation requires agencies to amend contracts to comply with the new plan.

NFFE disagrees with the legislation’s intent to allow agency management to circumvent previously negotiated and agreed-upon collective bargaining agreements. If passed, the bill effectively eliminates unions from bargaining over reentry plans. Further, the bill grants agencies unilateral authority to take back certain existing contractual rights and impose their own policies via these plans on topics that have been negotiable for decades.

“The problem with this bill is it sets a dangerous precedent that Congress can introduce workarounds to carve out union contracts and restrict collective bargaining,” said NFFE National President Randy Erwin. “Since the COVID pandemic began, NFFE has been working hand in hand with agency leaders to ensure employees can safely carry out the missions of their agencies. This bill undermines the White House’s efforts over the last year to create an empowered and safer federal workforce. Most agencies have already completed the work the RETURN Act calls for. The implication that agencies don’t have re-entry plans, or that offsite work stands in the way of mission delivery of essential services, couldn’t be further from the truth.”

“Essential employees have been working at the worksite throughout the pandemic, like our members who work in Passport offices, at military installations, on the fire line, at Visitors Centers in our national forests and parks, and in Veterans’ hospitals. Only people who can do their work offsite are eligible for telework.” continued Erwin. “This bill does nothing to solve the problems the lawmakers on Capitol Hill see with mission delivery of essential services. Their time would be better spent increasing funding for staffing if they really want to eliminate pandemic backlogs.”

“A law which presumes that remote work and collective bargaining are bad will be detrimental to the efficiency of the civil service,” continued Erwin. “The RETURN Act should be quickly shelved, and we look forward to working with our union partners and allies in the Senate to see it defeated.”

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*Established in 1917, the National Federation of Federal Employees is the oldest union representing civil service federal employees. NFFE represents 110,000 federal employees in 35 departments and agencies government-wide. NFFE is affiliated with the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, AFL-CIO. For more information, go to [www.nffe.org](http://www.nffe.org).*