



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS®

HAROLD A. SCHAITBERGER
General President

THOMAS H. MILLER
General Secretary-Treasurer

May 16, 2012

Member of Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the nation's 300,000 professional fire fighters and emergency medical personnel, I would like to express my strong opposition to Amendment #38 to H.R. 4310, *the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013*, sponsored by Rep. Phil Gingrey (R-GA). Congress should reject the Gingrey Amendment because it would repeal important provisions governing the legitimate use of official time for representatives of federal labor unions.

Federal fire fighters are proud to serve our country as the federal government's first responders. Our members bravely defend our military bases and other federal institutions from all types of threats—from outbreaks of dangerous fires to deadly attacks on our nation's soil. We risk our lives not from any desire for fame or fortune but because we, like you, have a deep love of country and community. Federal fire fighters, however, are not immune from the same challenges in the workplace that other private or public employees face, such as workplace discrimination, establishing acceptable workplace conditions, and filing appeals for suspensions and terminations.

Current law allows federal employees who serve as union representatives a reasonable amount of official time to perform functions on behalf of the union. Official time is granted without charge to leave or loss of pay and is authorized only when the employee would otherwise be in a duty status. Official time is typically used for negotiating collective bargaining agreements, investigating and filing grievances on behalf of federal employees, and representing federal employees in discrimination cases.

Official time helps federal union representatives balance their responsibilities to both union and non-union employees. By law, federal employee unions must provide representation to all employees in their collective bargaining units for basic services, regardless of whether they are union members or not, and the union cannot charge any fees for the services performed. In exchange for these added burdens required by law, Congress permitted federal employee unions to negotiate for official time when engaged in collective bargaining negotiations and for other duties before the Federal Labor Relations Authority.

It is important to note that official time cannot be used for internal union activity like soliciting other employees or conducting elections for union offices. These activities are clearly

independent of the basic functions of employment and thus should in no way receive taxpayer support. On this point, we all agree.

But official time is a good deal for taxpayers because it is an important tool in making the federal government more efficient and effective. Official time allows union representatives and federal managers to resolve workplace disputes without entering into costly litigation or lengthy formal grievance procedures. Official time also gives agencies and their employees a meaningful way to utilize employee input when addressing the challenges of the agency. Instead of fostering a costly and inefficient adversarial relationship between labor and management, official time has helped to create a more integrated, team-oriented relationship within our federal agencies.

Unfortunately, some critics of official time argue it is a waste of federal taxpayer dollars. But the Office of Personnel and Management concluded that official time represented less than two tenths of one percent of the civilian personnel budget in 2009. This amount is a small price to pay when taxpayers incorporate all the positive benefits of official time that help to make the federal government more efficient and effective.

For these reasons, I urge a "NO" vote on the Gingrey amendment #38 for H.R. 4310, *the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013*. Thank you for your consideration of the views of America's front line domestic defenders.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Harold A. Schaitberger". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Harold A. Schaitberger
General President