

Government Executive

Federal Employees Deserve the Nation's Gratitude

By Tony Reardon

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Here's a quick quiz:

- Who protects investors from insider trading?
- Who blocks contraband, drugs and terrorists from entering this country?
- Who collects 93 percent of all federal revenue and nabs identity thieves and tax cheats?
- Who cares for America's great wilderness and cultural treasures?
- Who makes sure the medicines you take are safe and work as advertised?

Federal employees do all of those things, of course.

During Public Service Recognition Week, let's recognize and appreciate all that federal employees do for this country and the value they add to our lives every day. Let's thank these dedicated public servants instead of casting aspersions on them. Let's appreciate the work done by these men and women, who are all too often targeted by some in Congress who belittle their contributions and sacrifices and zealously attempt to slash the budgets of the federal agencies that protect and serve us.

We rarely hear about how federal employees continue to serve the public during austere times and emergencies, how they are dedicated public servants with essential skills and talents.

From all the misguided rhetoric, you'd think all federal employees are bureaucrats or paper pushers. But the truth is the federal workforce's bottom-line purpose is to keep America running and to ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense and promote the general welfare so that we—all of us, regardless of our gender, age, race, ethnicity or sexual orientation—can form the perfect union that our Founding Fathers envisioned.

Think about these facts:

- Without the Environmental Protection Agency, Americans won't have clean air and clean water.
- If not for the Securities and Exchange Commission, investors would be vulnerable to crooked advisers and insider trading.
- Customs and Border Protection personnel block contraband, drugs and terrorists from entering this country and make sure international trade and travel proceeds smoothly.
- The Internal Revenue Service makes funds available for most federal programs and activities by collecting 93 percent of all federal revenue, cracks down on identity thieves and tax cheats and enforces the complex tax laws written by Congress.
- The National Park Service cares for America's wild places and protects our cultural and historical treasures.
- The Food and Drug Administration makes sure the medicines your doctor prescribes are safe and do what their manufacturers promise.

There are many, many more examples I could provide of the work that federal employees do without making a fuss, calling attention to themselves or expecting rewards or glory.

Given all that federal employees do for our nation, it's only fitting that we express our gratitude to them during Public Service Recognition Week, which lasts from May 1-7.

If you know a federal employee, thank them for what they do.

If you are a federal employee, you can be sure that there are many in this nation who acknowledge and value what you do.

And, as a citizen of this nation, I encourage you to learn more about how federal employees work to make our lives better and to make this the greatest nation on earth.

Tony Reardon is the head of the National Treasury Employees Union, which represents 150,000 employees in 31 federal agencies and departments.

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