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FEW Issues Legislative Agenda for 110th Congress; Paid Parental Leave and GPO/WEP Repeal Top the List

(Washington, D.C.) – Federally Employed Women (FEW) issued its Legislative Agenda for the 110th Congress. FEW members are pursuing positive legislative changes that will impact federally employed women in particular, and federal workers in general. Topping the list of legislative goals is enactment of a Paid Parental Leave Act and the repeal of the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) Social Security provisions.

Currently new parents employed by the federal government can take up to 12 weeks off upon the birth or adoption of a child – provided they can afford it or have enough annual or sick leave to use. These 12 weeks of leave are unpaid if the new parent does not have sufficient annual or sick leave to cover this period. FEW supports legislation that would create a new category of paid leave – separate from annual or sick leave – for employees after the birth or adoption of a child. This would not only be an added benefit for current federal workers, but also could attract many more potential employees to the federal government.

The GPO and WEP are two egregiously unfair Social Security provisions that have a disparate effect on women because they are generally clustered at the lower end of government salary pay scales and tend not to contribute as much to their pension funds because of family responsibilities and moving in and out of the workforce to stay at home. The GPO prohibits federal retirees from collecting both a full Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) annuity based upon his/her own government employment and full Social Security benefits based upon a spouse's employment. The WEP greatly reduces the Social Security benefits of a retired federal worker who paid into Social Security and also receives a government pension.

“FEW has developed an active grassroots advocacy program, and starting with this new Congress, we will be actively working to achieve these two goals, as well as other important initiatives as they arise,” advised Rhonda Trent, FEW President. “Our members sent thousands of letters to their Capitol Hill legislators during the last Congress, and our goal is to double, or even triple, that number during this Congress.”

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The FEW Legislative Agenda is broken out into three tiers. Tier I are those issues and concerns that directly impact federally employed women the most and which FEW members most actively work on through their advocacy program. This includes Paid Parental Leave; retirement benefits; enactment of an Equal Rights Amendment; Equal Employment Opportunity laws; and affirmative employment. Tier II issues are those which impact all federal workers such as worker safety and health; whistleblower protection, and workplace violence. Tier III are legislative issues that impact women in general, and includes violence against women; women's health care issues; and economic empowerment.

“Copies of this Agenda, as well as fact sheets on our top legislative issues, have been delivered to every legislator's office on Capitol Hill,” said Cecelia Davis, FEW Vice President for Congressional Relations. “It is important for all lawmakers to know the views of federal workers because every legislator can claim active or retired federal workers as constituents,” Davis added. FEW will soon be releasing new employment statistics detailing how many federal workers and retirees live in each congressional district and state broken out by agency.

Janet Kopenhaver, FEW's Washington Representative, will be meeting with new Members of Congress, as well as other key legislators and their staffs to discuss FEW's Legislative Agenda over the next few months. “Our goal is to inform legislators about the concerns of federal workers nationwide who provide essential services to our nation – from mail delivery to Social Security payments to food and drug safety to health care funding,” stated Kopenhaver. She added, “We are expecting vast numbers of retirements over the next couple of years from the federal government, so we must start now in providing incentives and protecting current benefits for new generations of Americans to choose a career in the federal government.”

FEW is a private, non-profit organization founded in 1968 after Executive Order 11375 was issued that added sex discrimination to the list of prohibited discrimination in the federal government. FEW has grown into a proactive organization serving over one million federally employed women – both in the military and civilian workforce.

A copy of the FEW agenda and other important legislative information can be found at www.few.org.

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