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FEW Washington Update
September 1 - 30, 2018
The August Break Ended – No Government Shutdown

The congressional action to prevent a government shutdown at the end of September almost went unnoticed due to the heightened press coverage of the hearings on the Supreme Court nominee, Judge Brett Kavanaugh. However, it is worth noting here that Congress overwhelmingly approved a compromise spending bill and pledged agreement on a short-term bill to fund the government. The $854 billion spending bill allocated funding for the Departments of Defense, Health and Human Services (HHS), Labor, and Education. It included increased funding for Pell Grants, the National Institutes of Health, the opioid epidemic, workforce development training, defense research, and a pay raise for members of the military, among other things.

The quick action in the House and Senate came as legislative leaders announced agreement on a bill to fund the rest of the government through December 7. The stopgap bill, however, would not address the President’s long-promised wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. GOP leaders have said they prefer to resolve that issue after the November 6 elections.
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FEW in Action

FEW’s Position on Sexual Assault/Harassment

FEW strongly believes that sexual harassment and misconduct will not be tolerated. FEW has pledged its support to combating sexual harassment in the workplace since its inception and will continue to do so through sensible advocacy. What rings true for the entire labor workforce is the lack of accountability for individuals committing acts of sexual misconduct and the absence of punitive procedures within the agencies following one of these instances.

FEW is committed to raising awareness, advocating for safe environment that encourage employees to speak out without fear of retaliation and providing opportunities for federal agencies to review their policies. If you are a victim, or survivor of sexual assault or abuse contact: National Sexual Assault Hotline 800-656-HOPE (4673) and online.rainn.org

FEW continues to advocate on the following legislative issues:
- Support for Sexual Harassment and Gender Discrimination Legislation
- Support for Paid Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA)
- Enactment of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)
- Support for Equal Pay
- Support for Federal Workforce/Increase Pay to Attract Skilled Workers and Maintain Retirement Benefits
- Inclusion and Diversity Discussions
- What Federal Workers can do to Advocate for their own needs and creating a unified front

FEW’s Legislative Agenda can be found on the National website at https://www.few.org/legislative-agenda/.
● **Family Medical Leave (FMLA):**

In September 2018, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics released new data from a survey taken in March, revealing that only 17 percent of all workers have access to paid family leave through their employers, an improvement of just two percentage points from last year. Just 39 percent have employer-provided temporary disability insurance for their own medical needs – unchanged from last year. In the private sector, 16 percent of workers have access to paid family leave and 42 percent have access to temporary disability insurance, up three percentage points and one percentage point from the previous year, respectively.

After last year's noteworthy increase in 2017 for public sector employees, access to paid family leave and temporary disability insurance for state and local government workers stalled this year at 25 percent and 26 percent, respectively.

Nearly 114 million workers lack access to paid family leave, and access continues to be low across all income groups and job sectors. In fact, there was not a single industry or income level in which even half of civilian workers had access to paid family leave.

Paid family leave and temporary disability insurance continue to be especially inaccessible for workers in low-wage jobs, part-time workers, workers in the service sector and those in blue-collar jobs such as construction, farming and transportation.

● **Military Sexual Harassment and Assault Study:**

After multiple delays, the Pentagon finally authorized RAND to release its report with estimates of installation- and command-level risk of military sexual assault and harassment. This follow-on report draws from the same data collected in 2014, as the groundbreaking RAND Military Workplace Study, which provided significant information about the nature, context, and prevalence of these scourges.

In this new research, RAND differentiates between “total risk,” largely driven by the demographic mix at the base (younger, junior ranking, unmarried service members are known to be at increased risk of experiencing harassment and/or assault), and “installation-specific risk,” which isolates the risk associated with an installation or command that is not explained by demographics. This portion of total risk may be linked to installation-specific features including
command climate, local traditions, the surrounding community, or other factors that commanders could be able to tackle.

RAND found very significant variations in installation-specific risk: in the Navy, for example, women’s risk could be up to twice as high on some ships.

As RAND notes, the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute’s Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS) – which assesses harassment among much of the force annually – could be used “to identify units and installations where sexual harassment risk and, by extension, sexual assault risk” are higher or lower. That information, in turn, could allow for more rapid and targeted intervention.

**Efficient Federal Government:**

Congress included language in the spending bill designed to block several of the Trump administration’s agency reorganization initiatives, at least until the White House provides fuller justification for its plans.

The restrictive language was put in HR-5895, the first of a series of packages of appropriations bills that Congress is moving just ahead of the end of the current fiscal year. That measure, which among other things provides funding for military construction and water programs, has been sent to President Trump for his expected signature.

The measure builds on restrictions included in current-year funding bills that will expire when those bills expire September 30. After their passage early this year, the administration announced a wide-ranging government reorganization plan, some of which it intends to carry out administratively while other parts would require changes in law. However, specific legislative language has not been sent to Capitol Hill for those falling in the latter category.

The funding bill takes a stand against several of the recommendations, primarily to shift Army Corps of Engineers navigation programs to Transportation and certain other responsibilities to Interior. A report on the bill from House-Senate conferees said that consultation with Congress on that idea “was nonexistent” and that carrying out such changes “will require enactment of legislation, which has neither been proposed nor requested to date. Therefore, no funds provided in this Act or any previous Act to any agency shall be used to implement this proposal.”
● **Federal Pay:**

Some House Republicans have joined the call for payment of a federal employee raise in January, potentially improving chances that House-Senate negotiators on the general government spending bill will agree to one.

While the White House and Congress have until year’s end to make that decision, it could come sooner, potentially before the end of this month.

The views of even a minority of House Republicans could be a key consideration as political leaders decide on what is shaping up as a choice between a freeze and a 1.9 percent average raise. The House earlier effectively endorsed President Trump’s call for a freeze by remaining silent on the raise in that bill, which it passed on largely a party-line vote.

In contrast, the Senate version—passed on a bipartisan 92-6 vote—contains a raise, which it would split as 1.4 percent across the board and 0.5 percentage points to be divided as locality pay. The Senate structured its language to not result in an increase in spending; it requires agencies to absorb the additional cost out of existing funding in accounts that fund salaries as well as expenses such as training and travel.

At least 16 House Republicans joined seven Democrats in a letter to Trump urging him to accept a raise if one is included in a spending bill presented to him. Several Republicans running for empty or Democratic seats in Congress also have backed a raise.

In two other letters, nearly all House Democrats urged appropriators to “stand with our federal workers by supporting the modest 1.9 percent pay raise passed in bipartisan fashion by the Senate.”