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Union to House: Give transit riders a bigger tax break

By Keith Laing

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The National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) is pushing lawmakers in the House to follow the Senate's lead in reviving a tax break for commuters who take public transportation to work.

The Senate Finance Committee voted to **restore** the amount of their monthly incomes that transit riders are allowed to set aside before taxes for their commutes to work to \$250 until 2015 in a broad package of tax reforms that was approved last week.

The transit commuter benefit had been reduced to \$125 on Jan. 1 over the objection of public transportation advocates, who argued that a similar tax break for drivers who park in garages was left unchanged.

The NTEU said Tuesday that the House Ways and Means Committee should join the Senate panel in moving to give transit riders parity with the tax breaks that are currently being enjoyed by commuters who drive.

"It certainly makes no sense for the government to provide workers using environmentally helpful mass transit a lesser benefit than those driving and parking personal vehicles," NTEU President Colleen Kelly said in a statement that was submitted to the Ways and Means Committee.

"Many working people who use public transportation to get to and from work rely on the transit benefit, which has provided much-needed relief in their commuting costs," Kelly continued. "Many of these workers are struggling in the current economic climate, and a reduction in these benefits is imposing a severe financial burden on them."

The transit tax break was first boosted to the same level as the parking credit in the 2009 economic stimulus package. The tax break for transit riders was extended again by Congress in early 2013, but the credit was returned to its normal level of \$125 on Jan. 1 of this year.

The tax reform package that is currently being considered by the House does not include a restoration of the transit tax break to pre-2014 levels.

Kelley said Tuesday that was a large oversight by lawmakers in the lower chamber.

“Simply codifying the current disparity between the transit and parking benefits in the tax code is just bad policy,” she said.