WASHINGTON, Sept. 24, 2013 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- American Federation of Government Employees National President J. David Cox Sr. today issued the following statement in response to the announcement that premiums for enrollees in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program will increase an average of 4.4% in January:

"Today's announcement that FEHBP premiums will increase an average of 4.4% next year for enrollees is unacceptable. Federal employees have had their pay frozen for an unprecedented three consecutive years, and more than a million employees lost a week or more of their wages this year when they were furloughed under sequestration.

"We are days away from the government shutting down unless Congress passes a new fiscal year budget, which will force more than 800,000 federal employees to stay home without pay. And unless sequestration is canceled, federal employees are facing another year of unpaid furloughs and even permanent layoffs.

"With everything else hanging over their heads, federal employees and retirees simply can't afford this increase in their health insurance premiums. The average salary of our members is $50,000 a year, which means they're taking home about $500 a week after taxes, retirement and health insurance. Hiking premiums by another 4.4 percent next year means our members will be bringing home even less income."

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) is the largest federal employee union, representing 670,000 workers in the federal government and the government of the District of Columbia.

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