

News from Washington

Social Security Fairness Act reintroduced in Senate



On March 3, Sens. Susan Collins (R-ME) and Sherrod Brown (D-OH) reintroduced the bipartisan Social Security Fairness Act (S. 597) in the Senate.

The bill, which is identical to legislation introduced in the House (H.R. 82) in January by Reps. Garret Graves (R-LA) and Abigail Spanberger (D-VA), would repeal the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP). The GPO and WEP are parts of Social Security law that unfairly reduce or sometimes eliminate Social Security benefits for millions of federal annuitants, including former Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) letter carriers.

WEP reduces earned Social Security benefits for CSRS employees and for Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) employees who also receive a public pension from another job not covered by Social Security. In addition, WEP affects employees who move from a job in which they earn Social Security to a job where they do not earn the Social Security benefit.

GPO affects CSRS employees and spousal benefits of people who work as federal, state or local government employees, if the job is not covered by Social Security. GPO currently reduces by two-thirds the benefit received by surviving spouses who also collect a government pension.

As this magazine was going to print, the legislation had 33 co-sponsors—26 Democrats, four Republicans and three Independents.

Despite bipartisan support in the House and the Senate, the legislation has been difficult to advance due to the price tag. NALC is committed to working on both sides of the aisle in the House and Senate to gain support for

the Social Security Fairness Act so letter carriers can receive the full benefits they have earned.

PRO Act reintroduced in House and Senate

The Richard L. Trumka Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act (H.R. 20/S. 567) was reintroduced in Congress on Feb. 28. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) introduced the bill in the Senate, and Reps. Bobby Scott (D-VA) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) introduced the legislation in the House.

The PRO Act would strengthen protections under the National Labor Relations Act, ensuring workers of their right to organize and bargain for better wages, benefits and working conditions. The bill also would create a mediation and arbitration process to ensure that corporations and newly formed unions reach a first contract, authorize unions and employers to negotiate agreements that allow unions to collect fair-share fees that cover the costs of representation, and protect the integrity of union elections against coercive “captive audience” meetings.

Additionally, the PRO Act would streamline the National Labor Relations Board’s procedures to effectively prevent violations by establishing penalties on corporations that violate workers’ rights, and by combatting the misclassification of workers as supervisors and independent contractors.

The PRO Act passed in the House in the 117th Congress but was not considered in the Senate.

“Every worker in this country deserves the right to organize and bargain for a better workplace and benefits,” NALC President Brian L. Renfroe

said. “NALC is fortunate to be an open shop with more than 93 percent of letter carriers choosing to be members of our union. We do not take our right to organize for granted, and NALC calls on Congress to pass this bipartisan legislation that supports and protects the entire American workforce.”

White House releases Fiscal Year 2024 budget proposal

On March 9, the Biden administration released its Fiscal Year 2024 (FY 24) budget proposal. The \$6.9 trillion budget request calls for \$809 billion in discretionary spending, a \$49.2 billion increase from Fiscal Year 2023 (FY 23), and \$886.4 billion in defense spending, a \$28 billion increase from FY 23. The proposal aims to reduce the national deficit by \$2.9 trillion over the next decade.

In contrast with budget proposals released by the former administration, the FY 24 budget does not include cuts to programs that govern the retire-

ment and health benefits of postal and federal employees.

Notably, the proposal calls for at least 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave per worker and urges Congress to guarantee at least seven sick days. It also calls for reinstating the child care tax credit of \$3,600 per child under 6 years of age and \$3,000 per child 6 and older. This would restore the amounts enacted under the American Rescue Plan Act in March 2021, which marked a raise from \$2,000 per child of either age group. The increases expired in December 2021.

The budget calls for \$90 billion for the Department of Education, a \$10.8 billion increase from FY 23. This includes \$500 million in grants for free community college and increased funding for expanding free pre-K. The proposal also includes \$15.1 billion for the Department of Labor, a nearly \$1.5 billion increase from FY 23. This includes funding to improve the unemployment insurance program and

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to increase worker protections through increased funding for the Labor Department's Occupational Safety and Health Administration and its Wage and Hour Division. The budget calls for \$137.9 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs, a \$3 billion increase from FY 23.

The budget request would offset spending and aim to preserve Medicare by increasing taxes for corporations and the highest-earning Americans. The proposal calls for those making \$400,000 or more to pay a 5 percent tax on all investment and business incomes and an additional 5 percent Medicare tax. Additionally, it calls for a minimum 25 percent tax rate on the 0.01 percent of America's top earners,

raising an estimated \$436 billion. Also, it calls for a 4 percent tax on stock buybacks, raising an estimated \$237 billion.

The presidential budget proposal is released annually and reflects the administration's priorities. It must be reviewed and approved by members of Congress, who control the budget and appropriations process. With a divided Congress, various provisions included in the budget request are unlikely to advance. The House Republican caucus has announced that it will release a budget proposal in the coming weeks. It is expected to contrast starkly with President Biden's proposal.

NALC will update letter carriers as the House and Senate begin their budget considerations.

President Biden nominates Julie Su as labor secretary

On March 1, President Biden nominated Julie Su to serve as secretary of the Department of Labor. Su has served as the deputy secretary of labor since July 2021.

Su, a Stanford University and Harvard Law School graduate, has specialized in legal work focused on civil rights and workers' rights. She served as the California labor commissioner from 2011 to 2018. She later served as the secretary for the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency before being confirmed as the deputy secretary of labor.

Su's nomination requires Senate approval. If confirmed, Su would replace Marty Walsh, who announced in February that he would step down as the agency's leader in mid-March for an opportunity to lead the National Hockey League Players Association.

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LETTER CARRIER POLITICAL FUND

LCPF is a non-partisan political action committee established for the purpose of electing qualified candidates who support letter carriers and a strong and innovative U.S. Postal Service. Since union dues can't be used to support candidates for political office, NALC relies 100 percent on member contributions to the LCPF, which in turn helps us support those on Capitol Hill who defend us.

Join the LCPF at nalc.org/pac



“On behalf of NALC, I congratulate Julie Su on this important nomination,” President Brian L. Renfroe said. “She is a strong supporter of unions and has been a lifelong defender of workers’ rights. She has the background and vision to successfully lead the agency.

“We also thank our union brother Secretary Walsh for his service. American workers are better positioned thanks to his leadership. We have enjoyed working with him and look forward to continuing to work with Julie Su. We urge the Senate to confirm her nomination swiftly.”

House and Senate reintroduce bill to expand vote-by-mail

On March 8, an updated version of the Vote at Home Act was reintroduced in the House by Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) and in the Senate by Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR). The bill, first introduced in 2017, would make it easier for Americans to vote by mail.

The bill would provide funding for the Postal Service to cover the costs

associated with mailing ballots to and from voters in federal elections. It also would simplify and promote vote-by-mail by mailing ballots to all registered voters in the weeks leading up to Election Day. Additionally, the legislation would include automatic voter registration for citizens who provide identifying information to the Department of Motor Vehicles.

“Vote-by-mail numbers have skyrocketed in the last two elections,” President Brian L. Renfroe said. “NALC is proud that letter carriers and the Postal Service make it easy for Americans to vote safely and securely by mail. We support this legislation, which would expand vote-by-mail and make it easier for all Americans to participate in the democratic process.”

NALC fact sheets

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