NALC Bulletin
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City Delivery and Workplace Improvement Task Force updates

NALC continues its work on the task force established by the Memorandum of Understanding Re: City Delivery and Workplace Improvement Task Force. The task force includes President Fredric Rolando, Executive Vice President Brian Renfroe, Director of City Delivery Christopher Jackson, Special Executive Assistant to the President Tim McKay and Assistant to the President for City Delivery Michelle McQuality.

NALC officers and staffers have been working with Postal Service representatives in subcommittees on a daily basis. While work has proceeded on addressing issues included in the MOU, recently, much of the work of these subcommittees has focused on the multitude of staffing issues in installations around the country.

Efficiency and use of space

One of USPS's biggest challenges during the 2020 peak season, and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in some locations, has been space in postal facilities to create the necessary capacity for processing and preparing parcels for delivery. Some of the space issues are prevalent in mail-processing facilities. The Postal Service has undertaken several initiatives to remedy this issue. One of those involves removing some Flats Sequencing System (FSS) machines and using the space for automated parcel-sorting machines. This has resulted in a number of delivery units and ZIP codes no longer receiving FSS mail.

This space crunch also has affected delivery units. The Postal Service is in the process of deploying smaller parcel-sorting machines that sort parcels by route at the delivery unit level. This subcommittee worked on ideas and came to agreement on a pilot test for the duration of peak season that is designed to create space where needed using a two-in-one casing method. The pilot approaches the two-in-one method much differently than did previous unilateral versions of this concept. The local parties jointly identify routes that will use the concept and identify which carrier routes will keep their current start times and which will be assigned the much earlier start times.

NALC and USPS will evaluate the pilot through peak season and determine if and where it may be beneficial to use in the future.

Staffing and scheduling

One of the biggest challenges both outside and during peak season is maintaining appropriate staffing levels in many locations. This subcommittee has continued to do deep dives into the staffing issues in a number of installations. One of the most widespread issues we see is difficulty hiring an appropriate number of city carriers.

There are several locations in Colorado and California where NALC and USPS have reached agreement in the past few years to hire and employ an all-career workforce in installations that have experienced this hiring difficulty. It has been successful in those locations. NALC is working toward an agreement with USPS to apply the same or a similar concept to other installations around the country that are having difficulty hiring. Appropriate staffing is crucial for letter carriers and for the service USPS provides. The success or failure of the Postal Service during peak season and beyond could depend on it. In other locations where the Postal Service doesn't have hiring difficulties, NALC and USPS are evaluating the need to hire beyond the normal complement in order to adjust to employee availability and high attrition rates.

Route evaluation and adjustment

NALC and USPS continue to explore and incorporate the technology that is now available in a route adjustment process. That work continues, and progress is being made. Additionally, NALC is now spending a significant amount of time with USPS executives and staff discussing the possibility of a national joint route adjustment process that would potentially kick off in early 2022.

Both parties at the national level have shown a sincere interest in developing the first national joint process in several years. NALC task force members are encouraged by the discussions and are optimistic that NALC and USPS can reach agreement on a process that builds on our past success in jointly evaluating and adjusting routes.

Mentorship and the new letter carrier experience

The New Employee Experience and Retention Program is a joint pilot program that involves various new and modified practices for all city carrier assistants (CCAs) and part-time flexible city letter carriers in selected offices. It began in May at two stations in Wisconsin and Michigan. Since then, the pilot has expanded twice to a total of 75 stations in four states.

NALC and USPS have also launched a joint pilot program designed to provide newly hired city letter carriers the opportunity to have mentoring relationships with experienced city carriers, through which feedback, coaching and positive reinforcement can be shared. The New Employee Mentoring Program kicked off in September and is being tested in 40 installations located in California, Iowa, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania and Texas.

With these two programs, progress is being made toward improving the learning experience for newly hired city letter carriers. More information about the details of both pilot programs is available on the NALC website at nalc.org and in M-01949 and M-01961 in the Materials Reference System, which is located at nalc.org/mrs.

Please check future editions of *The Postal Record* and the NALC website for further updates.

Congress funds government, raises debt limit through Dec. 3; negotiations continue on other priorities

The House of Representatives and the Senate passed legislation to fund the government and increase the country's debt limit until Dec. 3.

Both chambers passed a continuing resolution on Sept. 30 to fund the government until Dec. 3. President Biden signed the continuing resolution into law on Sept. 30, just hours before the midnight deadline to avoid a government shutdown.

This short-term fix includes funding to sustain federal agencies until Dec. 3, as well as $28.6 billion in aid to respond to recent hurricanes and wildfires and $6.3 billion to help resettle refugees from Afghanistan.

House members voted 219-206 on Oct. 12 on a rule (H. Res. 716) that cleared a bill that passed in the Senate (S. 1301) on Oct. 7 to raise the debt limit with an extension that expires on Dec. 3.

President Biden signed the bill into law on Oct. 15.

The bill raises the nation's borrowing authority by $480 billion, avoiding a default on the country's debt. This is a temporary bipartisan fix, and it leaves much work to be done on addressing the debt ceiling, which Republican lawmakers have said Democrats must do on their own. The debt limit and government funding will both expire on Dec. 3.

"The Democratic House has taken action to honor our responsibility to address the priority of the debt limit," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) said. "We have done so because this is about protecting families. The failure to lift the debt limit could result in a loss of up to 6 million jobs, the elimination of $15 trillion in household wealth and drastic increases in the cost of loans, car loans, mortgages, student loans, credit card bills and other borrowing."

The votes to avoid a government shutdown and to increase the debt limit have allowed lawmakers to temporarily shift their focus back to other priority legislation, including the bipartisan Infrastructure Improvement and Jobs Act (H.R. 3684) and a budget reconciliation package estimated to be $1.5 trillion to $3.5 trillion, both critical parts of President Biden's Build Back Better agenda.

As this *Bulletin* was going to print, negotiations were still underway to reduce the overall price tag of the budget reconciliation package. As a result, we can expect to see numerous proposals and priorities being eliminated or included at lower funding levels. Check the Government Affairs section of the NALC website for updates as they happen.

Update on NALC priority bills/resolutions

NALC remains focused on working with Congress to pass key pieces of legislation that affect letter carriers. A bill needs the support of 218 House members to pass when it comes to the floor for a vote. The Social Security Fairness Act (H.R. 82) has surpassed 218 co-sponsors, with 231 co-sponsors at press time. However, other NALC priority resolutions need additional support to surpass the 218-member threshold. Securing 218 co-sponsors as soon as possible is important because it helps solidify the language of a bill. For example, reaching 218 co-sponsors on the Postal Service Reform Act (H.R. 3076) will stop those who are trying to remove important language from the bill that continues six-day delivery.

NALC appreciates our members who have contacted their representatives to advocate for letter carriers' best interests, and we encourage you to continue to reach out to your members of Congress. As many congressional offices continue to function virtually or in a hybrid manner, the best way to reach your representatives is through district outreach emails. NALC encourages all members to contact their representatives to support these critical pieces of legislation:

- **Postal Service Reform Act of 2021 (H. R. 3076/S. 1720)**—a bipartisan bill that aims to provide financial and operational stability to the United States Postal Service.
- **The Federal Retirement Fairness Act (H. R. 4268)**—a bill that would provide certain federal employees the opportunity to make catch-up retirement contributions for time spent as temporary employees after Dec. 31, 1988, thus making such time creditable service under the Federal Employees Retirement System, and for other purposes.
- **Door Delivery (H. Res. 109)**—calls on Congress to ensure that the United States Postal Service should take all appropriate measures to ensure the continuation of door delivery for all business and residential customers.
- **Anti-privatization (H. Res. 47)**—calls on Congress to take all appropriate measures to ensure that the United States Postal Service remains an independent establishment of the federal government and is not subject to privatization.
- **Six-day Delivery (H. Res. 114)**—calls on Congress to ensure that the United States Postal Service should take all appropriate measures to ensure the continuation of its six-day mail delivery service.

Freedom to Vote Act introduced in Senate

On Sept. 15, Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) introduced the Freedom to Vote Act (S. 2747), a bill to expand voting rights and reduce the influence of big money in politics. The bill is co-sponsored by Sens. Tim Kaine (D-VA), Angus King (I-ME), Joe Manchin (D-WV), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Alex Padilla (D-CA), Jon Tester (D-MT) and Raphael Warnock (D-GA).

The bill includes several measures to address voter access and election administration. The bill would ensure that all voters could request a mail-in ballot, improve the delivery of election mail, and apply minimum standards to ensure that ballot drop boxes are available and accessible to all voters. Additionally, the legislation would implement automatic voter registration, make Election Day a federal holiday, allow same-day voter registration and expand early voting.

The bill also includes measures to improve election integrity through the protection of election records, infrastructure and ballot tabulation. It also would task the Election Assistance Commission with developing training and recruitment programs for non-partisan election officials. The bill would prohibit partisan gerrymandering and would require super PACs and other organizations that spend money in elections to disclose donors.

"With the Freedom to Vote Act, the entire voting rights working group, including Sens. Manchin and Merkley, is united behind legislation that will set basic national standards to make sure all Americans can cast their ballots in the way that works best for them, regardless of what ZIP code they live in," Sen. Klobuchar said. "This bill will ensure Americans can request a mail-in ballot, have at least 15 days of early voting, and can register to vote on Election Day."

Overall, S. 2747 is a scaled-back, narrower voting rights package than the For the People Act (H.R. 1/S. 1), which passed in the House earlier this year but was blocked by Senate Republicans. The Freedom to Vote Act has Democratic support; however, without the backing of any Republican senators, it would not receive the 60 votes needed to bypass the Senate filibuster.

NALC Health Benefit launches app

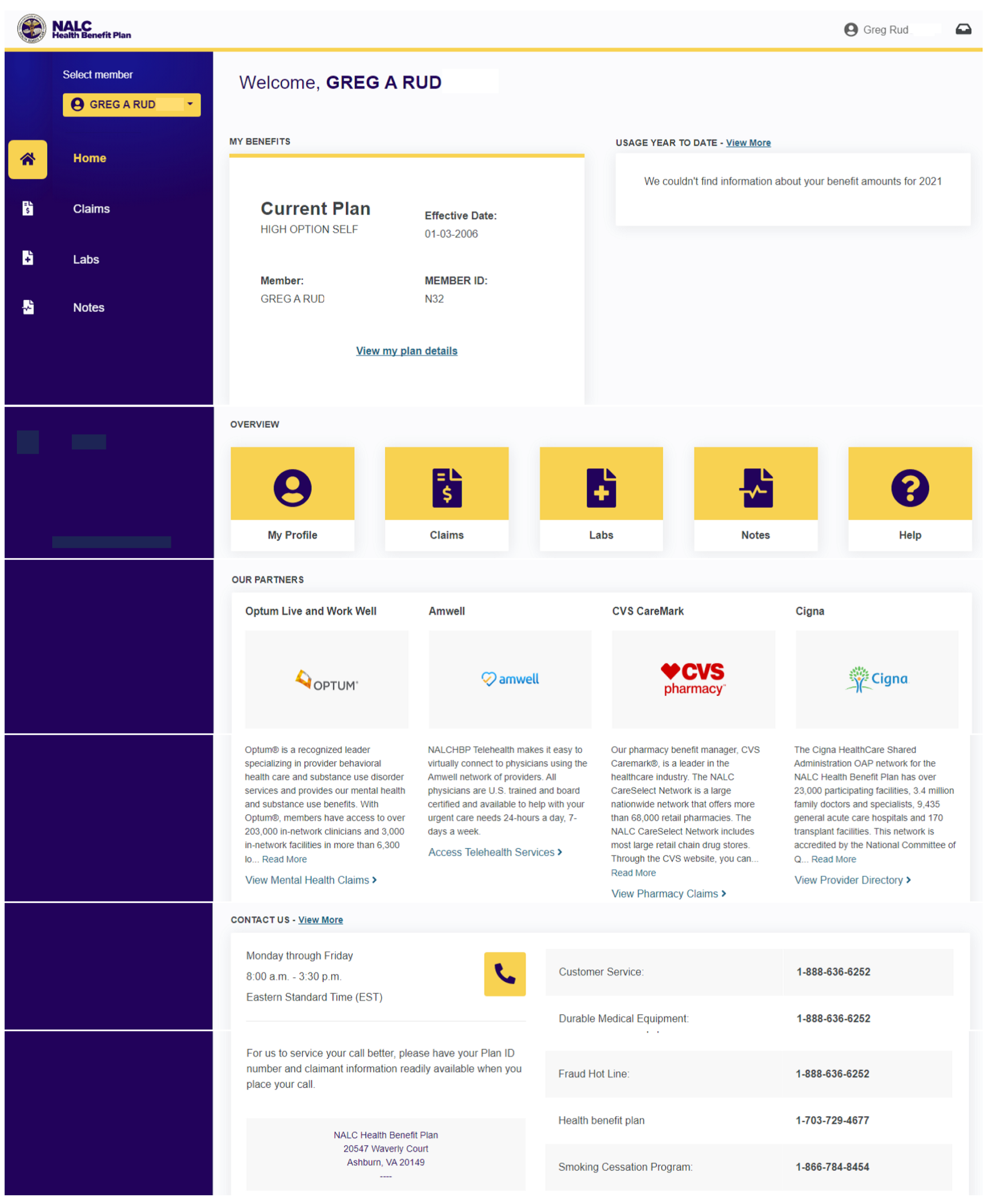
The NALC Health Benefit Plan announces the launch of its new mobile application and updated member portal.

Members now have secure access to their personal health information whenever and wherever they are. After creating an account, members can manage or view information about their deductible, claims history, out-of-pocket-expenses or benefits with 24/7 access; they can even message the NALC Health Benefit Plan and upload documents.

You can access the member portal on your desktop by visiting nalchbp.org and clicking the member login/register tab and creating an account. Or you can download the mobile app from the Apple App Store or Google Play.

To download the app on your mobile device:

1. Open the app store on your device.
2. Search for the NALCHBP Member Portal.
3. Click the "Get" button in the right corner.



CCAs have choices for their health benefits

The second week of November signifies the start of the 2021 Federal Benefits Open Season. Now is the time for city carriers and their families to review their health benefit options. Open Season is usually the one opportunity each year carriers have to enroll in or make changes to their health, dental and vision plans. Each year, Open Season runs from the Monday of the second full workweek in November through the Monday of the second full workweek in December. The Office of Personnel Management officially announced the dates for this year's Open Season as Monday, Nov. 8, through Monday, Dec. 13.

This article will discuss the health benefits available to newly hired employees throughout their time spent as a city carrier assistant (CCA) and upon transition to a career position for the Postal Service. Careful planning, as well as understanding what plans are available and the eligibility requirements to enroll in them, will ensure a successful health benefits enrollment process.

CCA rights regarding health insurance can be found in the 2019-2023 USPS-NALC National Agreement, Appendix B Section 3. Other Provisions, F. Article 21 – Health Insurance.

CCAs have two options for health benefits. One option is the USPS Noncareer Health Benefits Plan, in which newly hired CCAs may enroll and participate upon being hired. This option is available to all CCAs, regardless of length of service. CCAs may elect coverage in the USPS Noncareer Health Benefits Plan within 60 days of the date they were hired, or within 60 days upon being reappointed to another 360-day term after a five-day break in service.

For self-only coverage in the USPS Noncareer Health Benefits Plan, the Postal Service will make a biweekly contribution to the total premium for any CCA employee who wishes to participate in the USPS Noncareer Health Benefits Plan (USPS plan) self-only option equal to the greater of (a) $125, or (b) the minimum required by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

For self-plus-one or self-and-family coverage in the USPS Noncareer Health Benefits Plan, the Postal Service will make a biweekly contribution equal to 65 percent of the total premium for any CCA employee who wishes to participate in the USPS Noncareer Health Benefits Plan (USPS plan) for either self-plus-one or self-and-family coverage during a CCA's initial year of CCA employment. After a CCA's first year of employment, the Postal Service will make a biweekly contribution equal to 75 percent of the total premium for either self-plus-one or self-and-family coverage.

The 2019-2023 USPS-NALC National Agreement maintains the Postal Service's biweekly contribution of $125 toward self-only coverage in the USPS Noncareer Health Plan for Plan Year 2021. For CCAs who wish to select self-plus-one or self-and-family coverage under the USPS plan, the first-year contribution by USPS will be 65 percent for the remainder of Plan Year 2021. However, effective in Plan Year 2022, the Postal Service will contribute 75 percent of the premiums for self-only, self-plus-one or self-and-family coverage, regardless of the year of employment.

The second health benefit option available to CCAs is to participate in the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program. This option is available to CCAs after completing one 360-day term and being reappointed to another. The National Agreement provision governing CCAs' right to participate in FEHB is found in Appendix B, Section 3. Other Provisions F. Article 21 - Health Insurance.

CCAs may enroll in any available FEHB plan, including the NALC Health Benefit Plan (HBP), but there is no Postal Service contribution toward the premium. This means that the entire cost of the premium is the CCA's responsibility.

The NALC HBP is a comprehensive plan that has provided letter carriers and their families with first-rate health insurance since 1950. The plan is owned and operated by letter carriers and pays particular attention to their health needs. The plan is not for profit, focusing only on the health of its members. The NALC HBP was started by letter carriers for letter carriers, so it truly is your plan. The Plan partners with Cigna to provide the membership with a network of doctors, hospitals, ambulatory surgery centers and laboratories that all offer their services at a discounted rate. Cigna has more than 4 million providers and more than 21,000 facilities nationwide to choose from.

You can compare FEHB plans by visiting opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/open-season.

Upon conversion to career status, a letter carrier's health benefits options change significantly. Most importantly, once converted to a career status position, letter carriers have 60 days to enroll in an FEHB health plan. Converted CCAs will receive a package of information in the mail that includes a brochure listing the available plans and their costs. FEHB is available to all career letter carriers.

If a CCA was enrolled in the USPS Noncareer Employee Health Benefits Plan and converted to a career position, their enrollment would be terminated either 1) the last day of the month that is 28 days after they are converted to a career position, or 2) if they choose to enroll in an FEHB plan, the date the coverage begins, whichever is earlier.

Opportunities to enroll or make changes to health benefits are limited.

Carriers who do not enroll during their first 60 days of eligibility will have to wait to enroll, or to make changes, during Open Season, unless they have a qualifying life event (QLE)—for example, marriage or birth of a child. Since QLEs are not the same for all programs, carriers should visit the USPS LiteBlue page for the most updated information at liteblue.usps.gov/humanresources/benefits/elections/qualifying_life_events.

Now is Open Season, and it's important that letter carriers don't miss out on the opportunity to enroll in a health benefit plan or to make changes to their current enrollment during this period. It is beneficial for new employees to take the time to review the health benefit options and eligibility requirements listed above so that they can make an informed choice regarding the health benefit needs for both them and their family.

For more information about enrolling in the USPS Noncareer Health Benefits Plan, visit liteblue.usps.gov/humanresources/benefits. For more information about enrolling in an FEHB plan, visit opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/open-season. For more information about enrolling in the NALC HBP or for a plan brochure, visit nalchbp.org.

Kubayanda renominated to serve on Postal Regulatory Commission

President Biden announced on Oct. 6 his intent to renominate Michael Kubayanda to serve as a commissioner of the Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC). Kubayanda, who has served as the chairman of the commission since January, has been a member of the PRC since 2019. The renomination of Kubayanda is good news for the PRC and the U.S. Postal Service.

Prior to his service on the PRC, Kubayanda served as a board member and privacy officer for a digital health startup. He also previously worked with the USPS Office of Inspector General and as counsel to the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform.

The PRC is the independent body that exercises regulatory oversight over the Postal Service. Its responsibilities include preventing anticompetitive practices, promoting accountability, adjudicating complaints, setting postal rates and helping oversee delivery service standards. The PRC has five commissioners, who are nominated by the president for six-year terms and confirmed by the Senate.

NALC also has strongly urged President Biden to prioritize the renomination of Ron Bloom to serve a new term on the USPS Board of Governors (BOG). Bloom, the BOG chairman, currently is serving in a holdover year from his partial term that expired in December 2020.

Bloom has been an important leader in helping the Postal Service navigate through one of its most turbulent periods during the COVID-19 pandemic. In his time on the BOG, he has called for broad relief for the Postal Service in various COVID-19 recovery bills, led a subcommittee overseeing the Postal Service's national election task force alongside fellow BOG member Lee Moak, and urged the BOG to support and maintain six- and seven-day delivery. Bloom has actively worked with Postmaster General Louis DeJoy to bring wide bipartisan support for postal reform legislation, a top priority for postal workers across the country.

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