

Bargaining committees meet as negotiations continue

As reported last month, the National Association of Letter Carriers and the United States Postal Service formally opened negotiations for a new collective-bargaining agreement on Feb. 22. Since that ceremony, discussions have continued as various bargaining committees meet on specific issues while main-table negotiations take place.

Members of the NALC Executive Council—officers, national business agents and trustees—along with letter carrier staff members from NALC Headquarters are each assigned to bargaining committees.

The current agreement between NALC and USPS is set to expire at midnight May 20. If the parties fail to reach an agreement by then, federal law establishes a system of mediation and binding arbitration to resolve disputes. The law forbids strikes by postal employees.

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 *Bulletin* was going to print, the legislation had 36 co-sponsors—29 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.

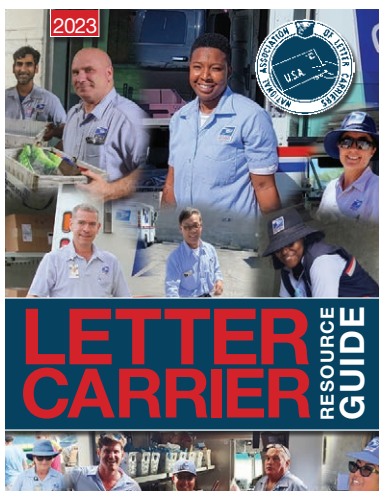
“Every worker in this country deserves the right to organize and bargain for a better workplace and benefits,” NALC President Brian L. Renfro said. “NALC is fortunate to be an open shop with more than 93 percent of letter carriers choosing to be members of our union. We do not take our right to organize for granted, and NALC calls on Congress to pass this bipartisan legislation that supports and protects the entire American workforce.”

2023 Letter Carrier Resource Guide now available

The 2023 *Letter Carrier Resource Guide*, a comprehensive guide for every letter carrier, is now available for download on the NALC website. Every NALC member can request a printed version of the guide or download the PDF free of charge.

The 2023 edition replaces the 2019 version and remains an all-in-one guide for all letter carriers to obtain important information pertaining to every stage of their career. The guide includes updated rights and benefits, and relevant changes to these rights and benefits, as letter carriers progress from city carrier assistant to career status. The guide includes chapters on NALC structure, health benefits, pay, uniforms, workroom floor issues, community service, legislation, and much more.

Members can get on the waiting list for a printed version of the guide by logging into the Members Only section and clicking on the picture of the guide. Select the check box to request a copy, and when the printed version is available, one will be mailed to the address on file.



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. Renfro 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.”

White House releases FY24 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 retirement and health benefits of postal and federal employees.

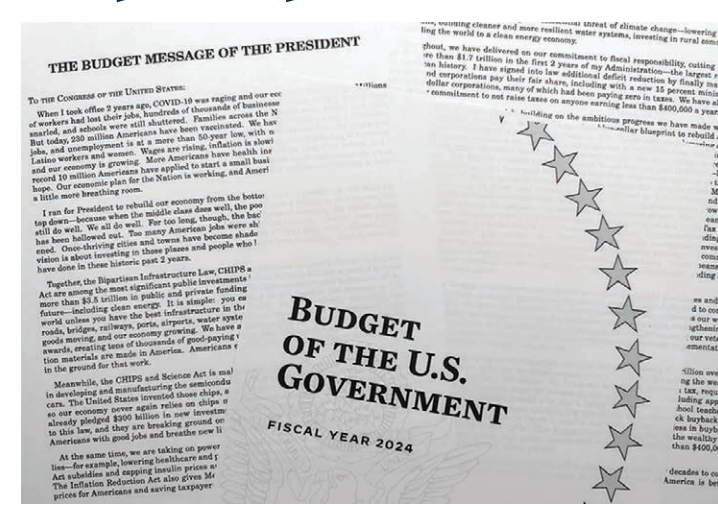
Notably, the proposal calls for at least 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave per worker and urges Congress to guarantee at least seven sick days. It also calls for reinstating the child care tax credit of \$3,600 per child under 6 years of age and \$3,000 per child 6 and older. This would restore 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 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.



Food drive set for May 13

Once again, letter carriers are preparing for the largest single-day food drive in the country. The Letter Carriers’ “Stamp Out Hunger” Food Drive is Saturday, May 13.

One in 8 Americans, including millions of children, senior citizens and veterans, are unsure where their next meal will come from. Letter carriers have helped meet the need by collecting food that postal patrons leave near their mailboxes on the second Saturday of each May.

NALC branches deliver the food to local food banks, which often face shortages in spring and summer because holiday donations have been depleted. And when summer comes, most school meal programs are not available, so the need for food grows. That makes the timing of the letter carrier food drive crucial.

Since the first national food drive in 1993, active and retired letter carriers, with the help of volunteers from their communities, have collected a total of 1.82 billion pounds of food.

“Letter carriers go out on their routes and see, up close, what their communities need,” NALC President Brian L. Renfro said. “We step up to meet these needs by filling the shelves of local food pantries. After 30 years, our commitment to the largest one-day food drive in the United States is intact and, in fact, still growing.”

Our national partners help make the annual food drive possible. The national partners are the U.S. Postal Service, the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, the National Rural Letter Carriers’ Association, Vericast, United Way Worldwide, the AFL-CIO, Valpak, the Kellogg Co. and CVS Health. These partners help through such actions as sponsoring the specially marked post cards, donating thousands of pounds of food and thousands of dollars to food pantries, donating bags that letter carriers distribute to customers to put their contributions in, gathering volunteers, or getting out the message about the food drive.

Since the food drive relies on volunteers all working together on a single day, publicizing the event is a big part of its success. NALC Headquarters and branch food drive coordinators use various means of communication to publicize the event.

The digital communications team at Headquarters is already busy spreading news and reminders on social media, including the event’s official social media accounts on Facebook at facebook.com/StampOutHunger and on Twitter at @StampOutHunger. Use #StampOutHunger to find or send messages about the food drive on either platform.

NALC’s Communications and Media Relations Department also promotes news media coverage about the food drive before, the day of, and after the event by distributing news releases and through individual outreach to newspapers, television stations and radio outlets nationwide. Meanwhile, branch food drive coordinators promote the effort on the local level.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused the cancellation of the in-person collection of food in 2020 and 2021 before it resumed last year. In its place, NALC held virtual donor drives, creating online donation and promotion tools for branches. The virtual donor drive was so successful that it will continue as a supplement to the traditional food collection. For more information about the virtual drive and how to get involved, including tools that make raising funds online easy, go to nalc.org/community-service/food-drive/2023-donor-drive.

After the big day, it’ll be time to measure our success. To do that, branches need to report the pounds of food they collected to NALC Headquarters by June 1. The official results form can be found on the Food Drive Tool Kit page at nalc.org/food, in the “For Food Drive Coordinators” section, along with information on sending photos.

Letter carriers who have questions about the food drive should contact their branch or regional food drive coordinator. Food drive coordinators with questions may contact Christina Vela Davidson, assistant to the president for community services, at 202-662-2489 or at cdavidson@nalc.org.

Stay informed by visiting the NALC webpage at nalc.org or by using the free NALC Member App available for iPhone or Android smartphones.



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NALC Bulletin is published semi-regularly by the National Association of Letter Carriers. Postage paid at Washington, DC, and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Membership Department, NALC, 100 Indiana Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2144.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS? Contact the Membership Department.

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