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. 12. Since that time, discussions have continued on various bargaining committees on specific issues while main-table negotiations take place.

Members of the NALC Executive Council—officers, national business agents and trustees—along with letter carriers, postal employees and students 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 15, Sens. Susan Collins (R-ME) and Sherrron 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. 81) 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 part of Social Security law that unfairly reduce or sometimes eliminate Social Security benefits of millions of federal employees, 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 federal employees 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 pressure of Republicans’ members 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.

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 2022 version and remains an online 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 carriers progress from city carrier assistant to career status. The guide includes chapters on NALC structure, health benefits, pay, uniforms, workroom floors, common 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. 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.”

White House releases FY24 budget proposal

On March 9, the Biden administration released its Fiscal Year 2024 (FY 24) budget proposal, which includes $90 billion in discretionary spending, a $4.9 billion increase from the FY 23 proposal, and $866.4 billion in defense spending, a $28 billion increase from FY 23. The proposal aims to reduce the national deficit by $2.9 billion over the next decade.

In contrast with budget proposals released by the former administration, the FY 24 budget includes no cuts to programs that go to retirement and health benefits of federal and postal employees. Notably, the proposal calls for at least a week’s paid family leave and medical leave as well as several new initiatives to reduce the national deficit by $2.9 billion over the next decade.

The budget calls for $90 billion for the Department of Education, a $4.9 billion increase from FY 23. This increase would go to grants for free community college and increased funding for expanding access for pre-K.

The proposal also includes $15.5 billion for the Department of Labor, a nearly $5.1 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 $33.9 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs, a $3 billion increase from FY 23. The presidential budget proposal is released annually prior to Congress’s annual deliberations. It must be reviewed and approved by members of Congress, who control the budget and appropriations processes 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 with the Senate Democrats’ proposal, which is expected to call for a 4 percent tax on stock buybacks, raising an estimated $237 billion.

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