



Photo by Talk Radio News Service

House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA) and other House Republicans who grandstanded for an unpassable balanced budget amendment while the debt ceiling crisis neared the default deadline.

# Debt limit limbo

## Tea Party obstruction threatens labor, letter carriers

**T**he threat that America would fail to raise its debt limit and default on its financial obligations dominated nationwide news coverage and casual conversation alike throughout July.

But by Aug. 2, Congress and the White House managed to hammer out a deal to raise the \$14.2 trillion “ceiling” by another \$2.1 trillion in two stages. The increase, which will go toward expenses the U.S. has already incurred, will be balanced with about \$2.5 trillion in spending cuts spread over the next 10 years.

What does all this mean for letter carriers?

For now, postal employees’ pensions and health benefits remain off-limits in the first round of cuts in discretionary spending. However, the second set of cuts could expose our health benefits and pensions to reductions. That all depends on the outcome of negotiations within the newly created Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction, the so-called “supercommittee” of 12 legislators comprised of six House members and six senators, each group evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans.

A simple majority of this supercommittee has until November to approve a cost-cutting plan. If Congress rejects that plan, though, across-the-board cuts to defense and entitlements could take effect.

If history is a guide, whether this new plan will gain approval remains a toss-up. In July, members of the House Tea Party caucus held up assent on any debt-limit rise, demanding that an increase be paired with a constitutional balanced-budget amendment. The delay tactic failed, though, as no such amendment was attached and 32 Tea Party

members even wound up voting in favor of the rise without it.

“We recognize that our members represent every political persuasion,” President Fredric Rolando said. “But it’s important to remember that this union as a body remains focused on protecting our members’ jobs and negotiated benefits, keeping our workplaces safe and securing our retirement.

“Negotiation is at the heart of what we, as a union, do with our employer,” he said. “Sadly, we learned this summer that some members of the Tea Party don’t seem to understand this, view unions as adversaries and think ‘compromise’ is a dirty word.”

Case in point: During this summer’s ordinarily routine talks to reauthorize funding for the Federal Aviation Administration, anti-union conservatives in the House, including those in the Tea Party caucus, insisted that the FAA bill include language that would force the National Mediation Board, which coordinates rail and airline employee elections, to return to an archaic rule to count as having voted “no” those eligible voters who did not actually take part in an organizing election, rather than simply count only those ballots actually cast.

After 10 days of grandstanding on this issue, during which the FAA was partially shut down and 74,000 employees were furloughed, Congress worked out a stopgap deal on Aug. 4.

“This agreement does not resolve the important differences that still remain,” Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) said in a statement. “But I believe we should keep Americans working while Congress settles its differences, and this agreement will do exactly that.” ☒