

Monitoring postal issues amid congressional chaos

As reported in last month's *Postal Record*, Sen. Tom Carper, (D-DE), ranking member of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs (HSGAC), has introduced the Improving Postal Operations, Service and Transparency Act of 2015—S. 2051, better known as iPost.

“While Senator Carper’s new bill contains several provisions we cannot support and raises a number of serious concerns for letter carriers and the larger federal employee community,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said, “we believe it is a good place to begin the conversation about how to preserve and strengthen the Postal Service for the American people while protecting the legitimate interests of all the key stakeholders.”

Postal issues, though, seemed to be far from the minds of most members of Congress through September and October. Taking center stage instead on Capitol Hill were last-minute, last-ditch efforts to avoid a shutdown of the federal government at the end of Fiscal Year 2015 (Sept. 30). With the clock ticking, Congress managed to pass a continuing resolution (CR) to temporarily fund the government through Dec. 11, with President Obama signing it into law just hours before the midnight deadline.

That effort helped cost the job of Speaker of the House John Boehner (R-OH), who announced that he planned to leave Congress in October.

House leadership elections and other headline-grabbing issues in

Washington, DC—including presidential primary season posturing—make it likely that lawmakers will focus most of their attention on matters other than postal reform, especially as Dec. 11 draws closer. But Rolando warned that letter carriers need to stay alert.

“Carper’s bill is the only real ‘reform’ bill that’s been introduced so far,” the president said, “and S. 2051 is expected to change over the next few months as the various postal parties provide the senator with their feedback.”

“So it’s imperative that NALC members familiarize themselves with this comprehensive bill and NALC’s position on it,” he said. “Carper’s bill is a good start, but we cannot endorse it in its current form.”

That’s why, the president said, NALC has been working over the past few months with a coalition made up of the four major postal unions, several key mailing industry groups, and USPS executives to develop consensus postal reform legislation. At the same time, some members in the House of Representatives from both parties have continued to hold bipartisan discussions about some form of postal reform as well.

“Our coalition intends to work with House and Senate leaders and members,” Rolando said, “to pass postal reform legislation that makes sense and that fairly meets the needs of our country, its people and its businesses.”

New speaker? Not so fast.

Further complicating matters in Washington has been the fight over the

leadership of the House of Representatives. Boehner surprised many when he announced that he was resigning effective Oct. 30—an announcement that came just a few months after a call for a vote to remove him from his position was threatened by members of the House Freedom Caucus, a group of about 40 conservative Republican House members.

“As a more centrist leader,” Rolando said, “Boehner has in the past shown an understanding about the need for positive postal reform, and NALC has consulted with him on the broad outlines of possible reform. With a new speaker, we will have to start all over again.”

Among those throwing their hats into the House leadership ring were Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), Rep. Daniel Webster (R-FL) and Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman Jason Chaffetz (R-UT). McCarthy was considered the clear frontrunner for the job, but after the House Freedom Caucus announced that it would not support him, he announced shortly before the Oct. 8 leadership elections that he was withdrawing his name from contention.

For the time being, Boehner has agreed to stay on as speaker until a generally acceptable candidate comes forward and elections can be scheduled. The speaker of the House is one of the most important positions in Washington, and second in the presidential line of succession, after the vice president.

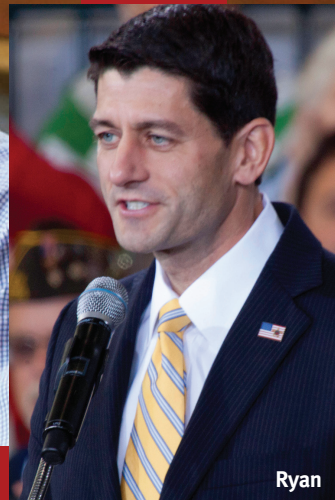
Will the real speaker of the House please stand up?

Following Speaker of the House John Boehner's surprise announcement that he would retire from the House and give up his position as speaker, there's been a lack of candidates who seem to have the support—and desire—to replace him. House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) seemed the most likely to win the election, until his own sudden announcement that he was dropping out of the race. As this issue of *The Postal Record* was going to press, there was a full-on effort to convince Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI) to run, though he repeatedly denied that he wanted the job. Until a new speaker can be found, Boehner has vowed to stay on.



Boehner

Photo by House GOP



Ryan

Photo by Starley Shelton



McCarthy

Photo by House GOP

Another name that has been floated by House leaders is Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI), chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee and the GOP nominee for vice president in 2012. Ryan, however, has stated that he is not interested in the job.

Although support for Chaffetz and Webster is not seen as particularly broad, if Chaffetz were to become speaker, he would have to give up chairmanship of his committee, which has jurisdiction over the Postal Service and postal legislation. And if he were to lose, his relationship with the next speaker might be negatively affected.

"This morass in Washington has proved to be a true challenge for all our legislative activists," Rolando said. "It's almost as if you can't really blame anyone for not wanting to be speaker. But having the House leadership in this much disarray makes it hard for letter carriers—for anyone—to plan and strategize, because you can't predict whether the leadership will know the score on your issues or whether you'll need to start the process from scratch.

"But it's a great lesson in modern civics," he said. "Getting laws passed is no longer as easy as it might have

been back in the days of that old Saturday morning cartoon, the one that showed how a bill became a law.

"I have no doubt that letter carriers are up to the challenges of the coming months and years," the president added, "but all of us need to be extra ready for the unpredictable path that lies ahead—because no matter what happens, the results could have profound effects on letter carriers and on the Postal Service."

Majority House support for six-day

By the end of September, the House had managed to do at least one important thing right: The resolution supporting the preservation of six-day mail delivery service saw the majority of that chamber's members—221 out of 435—sign on as co-sponsors.

"Thanks largely to the hard work of NALC's network of legislative activists," President Rolando said, "a great number of House members—on both sides of the political aisle—have indicated that they understand why mail delivery at least six days a week is so important to residential and business customers alike."

But if H.Res. 12 is a non-binding resolution, why is majority support so important? "When a member of Congress signs on to a resolution," the president said, "it puts their position on the record. As far as letter carriers are concerned, this can serve as a sort of backstop in lawmakers' negotiations on postal issues, helping to offset proposals to strip away six-day mail delivery."

The president stressed, however, that as important as it is to have reached this milestone, activists must keep building on this momentum.

"Support is so strong for six-day delivery that the House voted to preserve it through its annual appropriations process earlier this year," Rolando said. He added that the Senate Appropriations Committee also has voted to preserve six-day mail language in its version of the bill, but the appropriations process in the upper chamber was still stalled as this magazine went to press, with senators continuing to work through a number of procedural distractions and delays.

Agreement reached on TPP

Trade negotiators met in Atlanta at the end of September to conclude

an agreement on the 12-nation Trans-Pacific-Partnership (TPP) trade deal, after overcoming a number of hurdles related to the dairy, auto and sugar markets as well as disputes regarding pharmaceuticals and agricultural products.

“The TPP—which has been entirely negotiated behind closed doors—is a serious concern for NALC,” President Rolando said, “because it might include rules that would ban postal banking, regulate the definition of universal postal service to exclude package delivery and impose stiff restrictions on state-owned enterprises such as the Postal Service.

“We will forcefully oppose Congress’ adoption of the TPP if it turns out that the agreement would harm letter carriers’ interests in any way,” he said.

Under the terms of the Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) law signed by President Obama in June, the president must give Congress at least 90 days’ notice before signing the TPP. In addition, the president also must provide details of the agreement to the International Trade Commission. Further, TPA—better known to letter carriers as Fast Track—requires public posting of TPP’s text 30 days after the 90-day notice of intent to sign.

“Given this timeline,” Rolando said, “it is unlikely that Congress will vote on the TPP before early next year. However, anything can happen.”

Visit the Government Affairs page at nalc.org to find out more.

In the news media

President Rolando’s letter to the editor of *The Los Angeles Times* ran on Oct. 13, taking the paper to task

for part of its Oct. 9 news story about the Heroes of the Year ceremony (see page 16), an otherwise good story that ended with an unrelated reference to the Postal Service’s financial issues and to a Brookings Institution study that touts the so-called advantages of a partially privatized USPS.

The president had a letter to the editor of *The Washington Post* run on Oct. 10 in the paper’s popular Saturday “Free for All” section. The letter responded to the *Post*’s flawed article earlier that week about the Brookings study.

Another letter by Rolando, this time to the editor of *The Washington Times*, ran on Oct. 1. It rebutted a commentary piece by Ken Blackwell, former Ohio treasurer and secretary of state and former mayor of Cincinnati.

On Sept. 29, President Rolando and postal issues dominated the editorial page in Minnesota’s *Cold Spring Record*. The president’s letter to the editor that day responded to an earlier editorial that had blamed postal pensions for USPS’ financial problems. On the same page as Rolando’s letter, *Record* Editor Mike Austreng wrote that the earlier editorial had confused pensions with retiree health benefits, and that he had since learned that the cause of the financial issues at the Postal Service is the congressional mandate that USPS, and only USPS, fully pre-fund these benefits. Austreng’s “Corner Copy” column then introduced Rolando’s letter and invited people to read it.

NALC Chief of Staff Jim Sauber was quoted extensively in an Oct. 7 online *Washington Post* article that followed up on reaction to the Brookings study. Although the article had some flaws,

it did acknowledge that pre-funding accounts for most of the Postal Service’s losses, that no other entity is required to pre-fund at all, and that postal finances have stabilized as the economy improves.

Sauber also weighed in heavily on a Sunday, Oct. 4 *Baltimore Sun* story about the Brookings study. The story put the study into context, including comments from Sauber and the Postal Service as well as from Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-MD), who represents Baltimore and who serves as ranking member of the House committee with USPS oversight.

Idaho State Association President **John Paige**’s letter to the editor of the *Coeur d’Alene Press*, supporting voting by mail, ran on Oct. 9.

Retired Kansas State Association President **Rod Holub**’s letter to the editor of Manhattan, KS’s *The Mercury* ran on Oct. 3.

Fresno, CA Branch 231 letter carrier **Eric Ellis**’ letter to the editor of *The Fresno Bee* ran on Oct. 2.

News coverage of 2015 Letter Carrier Heroes of the Year awards included a *Los Angeles Times* story about the Oct. 8 awards ceremony; a USPS News Link story about this year’s honorees; an *Akron Beacon Journal* article about Akron, OH Branch 148’s **Kizzy Spaulding**, the Central Region Hero of the Year; articles about Tulsa, OK Branch 1358’s **Steve Shipman**, the Western Region Hero of the Year, in *Tulsa World*, People.com, E! News and the *Miami [OK] News-Record*; and an article in Riverside, CA’s *The Press-Enterprise* about Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100’s **James Robledo**, the Humanitarian of the Year. **PR**