

USPS ‘most favorable’ federal agency; Board of one Governor; more news

A national poll conducted by the Pew Research Center has again shown that the U.S. Postal Service is the most favored among all federal agencies.

“This honor recognizes the hard work and dedication of letter carriers and everyone who works for this venerable agency,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said. “I’m confident that as the public face of the Postal Service, letter carriers will continue to do what we can to ensure that our employer maintains and even strengthens that trust.”

The national survey’s findings, released on Nov. 23, were based on more than 6,000 interviews conducted by Pew between the end of August and the beginning of October. Favorable ratings were provided by 84 percent of those surveyed—up one percentage point from a similar survey conducted in 2010.

Rounding out the top five agencies were the National Park Service with 75 percent, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention with 71 percent, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration with 70 percent and the Federal Bureau of Investigation with 68 percent.

What entity was at the bottom of the list? Only 27 percent of those polled gave a favorable rating to Congress, the same body that has not yet eased the financial burden it created under the 2006 postal law that requires USPS—alone among government agencies and private enterprises—to pre-fund 75 years’ worth of future retiree health benefits and to do so over a 10-year period.

While the study found what it called “substantial partisan gaps” in the views of several federal departments and agencies, the Postal Service was not one of those entities. In fact, 89 percent

of Democrats polled, including those whose political views lean to the left, held a favorable view of USPS, only 11 percentage points higher than Republican and right-leaning respondents.

Pew found that public attitudes about government and politics are not easy to categorize. “In general, the federal government continues to be viewed less favorably than state and local governments,” its survey report said. “The last time the federal government was viewed as favorably as state and local governments was in the period after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and during the early phase of the Iraq War.

“A year ahead of the presidential election,” the Pew report added, “the American public is deeply cynical about government, politics and the nation’s elected leaders in a way that has become quite familiar.”

More questions

Meanwhile, an unusual survey conducted by the University of Maryland for the Voice of the People’s Citizen Cabinet Initiative found that an “overwhelming majority” of respondents favored relaxing the pre-funding requirement.

What made this survey special—and somewhat different from the Pew poll—was that it gave its respondents what it considered a “real-world briefing” on the issues, in an attempt to simulate the path that policymakers might take when making policy decisions.

“This methodology might help explain some of this survey’s results,” Rolando said, “and it goes to show that how a question is phrased can often-times influence the answer it gets.”

For example, on the question of pre-funding, respondents received a fairly

thorough briefing on the matter before they were asked to respond. The same attention to detail could be found in survey questions about allowing USPS to offer a wider range of products and services to raise revenue and on whether postal rates should be allowed to go up at a faster rate than that of inflation if warranted. Both of those questions received majority favor.

Respondents received much less detail and background, however, on questions of whether Saturday mail delivery should be eliminated as a cost-saving measure and about whether arbitrators should be required by law to consider the Postal Service’s financial situation when rendering decisions.

For example, respondents were not told about several studies—some of which were paid for by USPS itself—that had determined that, should Saturday mail delivery be cut, greater numbers of people would be increasingly forced to abandon the Postal Service and embrace non-postal Saturday mail alternatives, resulting in financial losses that would far outstrip any possible cost savings.

And while the question regarding arbitration did note that “arbitrators make their decisions based on what issues are raised by each side in the dispute,” it failed to point out that USPS always includes its current financial situation and long-term projections in every arbitration proceeding. “It would be absurd for the Postal Service not to do so,” Rolando said.

The Citizen Cabinet study was conducted from the beginning of July through mid-August among more than 2,200 respondents—about 700 nationwide, plus an additional 500 or so each

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Beyond Distrust: How Americans View Their Government

Broad criticism, but positive performance ratings in many areas

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from Virginia, Maryland and Oklahoma.

A board of one

The terms of USPS Board of Governors members Ellen Williams and Louis Giuliano officially expired on Dec. 8, leaving a board that is supposed to have nine Senate-confirmed members with just one: James Bilbray.

"This situation is yet another indication of how Congress is failing to do its job," President Rolando said. "It shouldn't be so difficult for our elected representatives to at least bring the nominations forward for an up-or-down confirmation vote."

The Senate has not confirmed a Board of Governors member since 2010. Moreover, Bilbray's seven-year term expired in December as well, but laws governing the Postal Service allow for a governor to stay on and serve an additional year until a replacement can be nominated and confirmed.

In December 2014, the board created a so-called "temporary emergency committee" to allow it to continue to operate in the absence of a quorum. (Postmaster General Megan Brennan and Deputy PMG Ronald Stroman, by virtue of their offices, also serve on the board as non-voting members.)

Five nominees are awaiting confirmation—some are former governors who have been nominated to serve on the board again. By law, no more than five governors can be from the same political party, a measure designed to help ensure that the board remains bipartisan.

In a statement on Dec. 8, Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Ranking Member Tom

Carper (D-DE) acknowledged that congressional inaction has placed the board in this unusual position. "Congress has failed to protect postal customers," he said. "This would never occur in the private sector because shareholders would demand oversight from a strong board to protect their investment."

As this magazine was being prepared, there had been almost no forward momentum on any sort of postal measure in either the House or Senate. However, Carper's iPost bill, introduced in September, did gain three co-sponsors in December: Sens. Jerry Moran (R-KS), Clare McCaskill (D-MO) and Roy Blunt (R-MO). This brings the total number of S. 2051's co-sponsors, including Carper, to four.

"Senator Carper's bill still contains several provisions we cannot support and it raises a number of serious concerns for letter carriers and the larger federal employee community," Rolando said. "However, we remain convinced that it is a good place to begin a conversation about how to preserve and strengthen the Postal Service for all Americans while addressing the concerns of all those who have specific postal business interests."

NALC continues to work with the other three postal unions, with a number of mailing industry groups and with postal executives to work out some

How Americans Would Fix the U.S. Postal Service



A survey of the Citizen Cabinet, Nationally and in Maryland, Oklahoma and Virginia

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form of postal reform legislation that would be acceptable to all concerned.

In the news media

President Rolando had a letter in *The Economist* (online on Dec. 3, in print Dec. 4) that rebutted an earlier *Economist* article dismissive of the Postal Service and bearing a headline asking how an organization can lose \$5 billion in a year. The weekly magazine, published in London, has about 5.3 million readers, more than half of them in the United States—including political, business and intellectual leaders.

Rolando also had a commentary piece that ran in *Newsweek* on Nov. 24, rebutting a piece that took a highly one-sided view of the USPS annual report and postal finances. The president's piece informed *Newsweek* readers of USPS' actual status.

Kearney, NE Branch 312 President **Ken Nickerson** had a letter to the editor in the *Kearney Hub* on Nov. 28.

Idaho State Association President **John Paige** had a letter to the editor run in two newspapers: the *Twin-Falls Times News* on Nov. 22, and the *Idaho Press-Tribune* on Nov. 19.

Links to these and other news items can be found on the Postal Facts page at nalc.org. **PR**