

Springtime for Congress



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The cherry blossoms in Washington, DC, have come and gone, and the same will be said of Congress soon, as representatives plan to be in the nation's capital for about 40 days before they depart for summer recess. Afterward, they'll return to Capitol Hill for a brief stint before turning their attentions to the elections this fall. (That's another story for another time.)

This timeline does not leave many opportunities for members of Congress to iron out pending issues on which they have failed to reach compromise—e.g., the Flint water crisis, trade, energy, tax reform, FAA reauthorization and, of course, the nomination to fill the Supreme Court vacancy. The list of issues, which goes on, also includes funding the government for the upcoming year. So what will House and Senate members be doing during their time in Washington?

For starters, it's appropriations season this spring, and Congress' plan is to continue working on a federal budget to fund the government for Fiscal Year 2017. The House Republicans' budget actually suggests placing the Postal Service back on-budget, a risky proposition that, on the one hand, could grease the skids for postal reform—but it also could backfire and make the U.S. Postal Service a negotiable budget item. (Recall that in 2014, some members of Congress kicked around the outrageous, and ultimately scrapped, idea of using a Saturday mail delivery cut as an offset to help stimulate the Highway Trust Fund—even though USPS doesn't rely on taxpayer money or Congress to fund its operations.)

Further, the exigent rate increase expired on April 10, lowering the price of stamps and reducing USPS' revenue by a projected \$2 billion annually. It won't be long before letter carriers begin hearing about that lost postal revenue—losses make service cuts a popular topic on Capitol Hill, especially during appropriations season.

How about postal issues?

Although NALC doesn't expect to see much action on postal reform this year, we always keep an eye out during the appropriations process for any discreetly placed cuts to service and delivery standards. In the past, we've successfully fended off most of these types of threats by catching them early and by depending on our congressional allies who support a strong Postal Service and who demonstrate this support by introducing and co-sponsoring our core House resolutions.

These three service-related resolutions include one that supports preservation of six-day mail delivery (H. Res. 12), one on maintaining door delivery (H. Res 28) and one on

restoring service standards (H. Res. 28). All three resolutions have been co-sponsored by many House members from both political parties.

There might be a more comprehensive postal bill coming from the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee (HOCR) soon, so preparation will be key.

In the Senate, the Improving Postal Operations, Service and Transparency Act (iPost, S. 2051) is still pending before the Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee (HSGAC). The bill is not perfect, and NALC President Fredric Rolando expressed our concerns about the legislation during a hearing earlier this year. We will continue to work with HSGAC to improve the bill ahead of any additional action that might come up.

Bottom line: NALC remains prepared to take up the discussion at the appropriate time should Congress take up postal reform during this session.

Throughout all of the uncertainty surrounding what Congress can and will accomplish this year, it's important that letter carriers continue to take advantage of the momentum that we have worked hard to build by continuing

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to beat the drum for support for our resolutions. Largely because of NALC's activists—who have worked tirelessly with their representatives to share the importance of these resolutions—there has been a long history of success in ensuring that these important pieces of postal legislation get incorporated into the budget, and we continue to build more support for other issues important to letter carriers.

To learn more about these and other happenings on Capitol Hill, visit the Legislative and Political Affairs section of nalc.org.