

# Postal bills await as congressional clock ticks

**I**n May, NALC President Fredric Rolando testified before the House committee with U.S. Postal Service oversight as it was ramping up its work on postal-related legislation.

In his testimony, the president urged the Oversight and Government Reform Committee to consider a narrow set of provisions that most postal stakehold-

ers agree point the way toward greater financial stability for USPS. (See the June *Postal Record*, available at [nalc.org](http://nalc.org), for details.)

The following month, the committee, which has USPS oversight, released a discussion draft of possible legislation; in July, it approved the bipartisan Postal Service Reform Act of 2016, H.R. 5714.

“H.R. 5714 is a comprehensive postal reform bill that includes many of the consensus reform provisions backed by NALC, the Postal Service and a business coalition representing a cross-section of the mailing industry,” Rolando said. “It also embraces a number of NALC’s suggested changes to the discussion draft.”

Unfortunately, he noted, the bill also proposes significant, unacceptable cuts in door-to-door mail delivery, granting USPS the discretion to mandate the conversion of 5.5 million business delivery points from door delivery to centralized delivery. It also would allow the Postal Service to convert a significant number of residential door deliveries to cluster-box or curbside delivery on a voluntary basis.

And while the bill supports greater integration of Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) coverage with Medicare, it fails to grant a hardship exemption for current annuitants who would be required to sign up for Medicare Part B.

“As it is currently drafted, we would oppose its final passage,” the president said.

## Next steps

H.R. 5714 now awaits consideration by the full House of Representatives, when NALC’s allies in that chamber will have a chance to propose amendments that would delete the door delivery cuts and fix the FEHBP failures.

But with a full slate of competing priorities crowding the already tight legislative calendar, there are few guarantees

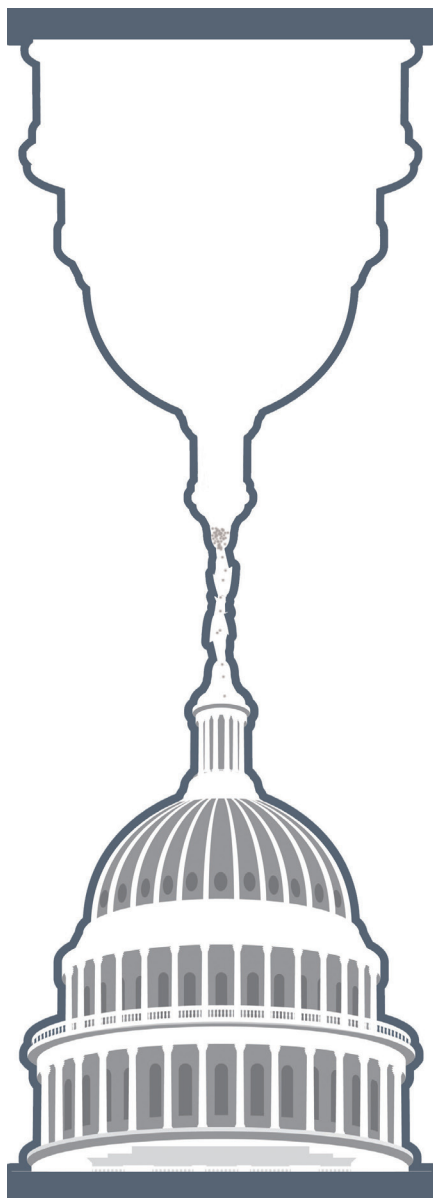
that House leaders will find the time to take up any sort of postal bill before the chamber adjourns in December.

A perfect scenario would see the House take up H.R. 5714 soon and amend it to align with NALC’s priorities. A similar, simultaneous process would take place in the Senate over S. 2051, the iPost bill that has problems of its own and that hasn’t seen any consideration beyond its introduction by Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE) nearly a year ago. (For a comparison of these two bills, see Director of Legislative and Political Affairs Kori Blalock Keller’s column on page 55.)

Even in an ideal world, the path to becoming law is not an easy one. The House and Senate bills would then head to conference committee consideration (where any differences between the two could get reconciled), followed by a return to both chambers for final approval votes—with a single, complete measure getting signed into law by President Obama.

Unfortunately, reality looks a bit different. For one thing, as this *Postal Record* was being prepared, Congress was scrambling to pass some sort of acceptable spending measure that would keep the government running past the end of Fiscal Year 2016 on Sept. 30. It was still uncertain at press time whether that measure would be an actual appropriation bill for FY 2017 or, more likely, a continuing resolution (CR) to maintain funding levels beyond the Sept. 30 deadline.

Some form of postal legislation—the aforementioned bills, or something entirely different—could be tacked on to an appropriation bill, a CR or some other must-pass measure, although in recent years, Congress has shown a preference for taking up clean measures without a lot of add-ons. But recent years also have shown that nothing is a lock when it comes to Congress.



If postal legislation does not get attached to some other bill, then the shrinking congressional calendar works even less in favor of postal legislation getting passed. That's because Congress is set to recess this month for another "district work period"—which coincidentally takes place during the final run-up to Election Day.

After Nov. 8, the House and Senate are set to return to Washington for a few more weeks for what's known as the "lame duck" period. Here, legislators who lost their re-election campaigns or who chose not to run again have nothing to lose by voting however they wish. There have been talks about limiting the lame-duck session to consideration of must-pass legislation.

It's worth noting that the 2006 postal reform bill, the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act (PAEA), was passed during a lame-duck session.

### Turning up the heat

To reach a majority in the 435-member House of Representatives, it takes 218 legislators. Two of three NALC-supported non-binding resolutions have surpassed that threshold: H.Res. 12, Rep. Sam Graves' (R-MO) resolution supporting six-day mail delivery had 236 co-sponsors at press time, and Rep. David McKinley's (R-WV) H.Res. 54—calling for the Postal Service to return to 2012 service standard levels—also had 236.

"Gaining majorities on such resolutions can really help when actual, binding legislation comes up for consideration," Rolando said. "It helps us broadcast a powerful message of support."

Meanwhile, H.Res. 28—Rep. Susan Davis' (D-CA) pro-door delivery resolution—was just nine short of that 218 mark at press time. NALC has enlisted our active and retired members on the e-Activist Network to help get that number to 218 and beyond.

"So our fight to get positive postal reform passed this year is far from over," Rolando said. "Nevertheless, letter carriers can rest assured that if nothing happens on that front by year's end, we'll be ready to start the process over again in January when the 115th Congress is sworn in.

"From one Congress to the next, we build on our alliances, we build on what we've learned, and we modify our strategies," the president added. "We won't be starting from scratch, and I'm confident that our strong base of letter carrier activists will be ready to work again with our coalition of stakeholders—the Postal Service, our sister postal unions, key legislators and members of the mailing community—to charge ahead with our allies in Congress next year, if necessary, as we continue to make progress toward real postal reform to help the Postal Service flourish in the 21st century."

### Third-quarter financial figures

On Aug. 9, USPS announced its financial results for the third quarter of Fiscal Year 2016, covering April, May and June.

"Today's quarterly report puts the year-to-date operating profit of the Postal Service at \$1.3 billion," President Rolando said in a statement, "demonstrating the overall strength of the postal turnaround.

"Operating profits for each of the past two years have exceeded \$1 billion," he said, "and the Postal Service is now into its fourth straight year of operating in the black. The year-to-date operating profit is up by \$100 million from 2015's first nine months."

The full statement can be found on [nalc.org](#) under "Latest News."

While the third-quarter report showed a \$522 million operating loss, Rolando said that this reflected the typical slowness of the third quarter plus the stamp price rollback that came with the ending in April of the "exigent" price increase.

"The big picture is that USPS operations are \$4.4 billion in the black since 2012," Rolando said. "As the internet drives online shopping, package revenue is skyrocketing, auguring well for the future."

A wide range of news sources covered the report and quoted Rolando extensively, including Federal News Radio, *Government Executive*, *The Washington Examiner* and New York's *The Chief Leader*.

### Elsewhere in the news media

The Arlington, VA-based Lexington Institute published on Aug. 30 a commentary by President Rolando, and for a while made it the lead item on its website. Lexington is among Washington's top defense and national-security think tanks.

Rolando had a commentary in the Aug. 1 edition of *The Hill* about H.R. 5741 (see above). He also had a commentary in Sonora, CA's *The Union Democrat* on July 19, explaining the national value of USPS and letter carriers, their local economic and civic importance and the improving postal finances.

On July 20, the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research's Economics21 published a commentary by Rolando that explained the situation at the Postal Service: operating profits, the overall value to the country of USPS and letter carriers, the impact of pre-funding and more.

Lynn, MA Branch 7's Patrick Byrne, the 2016 National Heroes of the Year Special Education Award winner, was featured in a Sept. 2 story in the *Lynn Daily Item*.

Central California Branch 231 letter carrier Eric Ellis was asked by *Mormon Press* to write a piece about why he is both a Mormon and a union activist. It ran on July 27.

Links to these stories and more can be found at [nalc.org](#) under "Postal Facts." **PR**