



New president, new Congress, new challenges

The 114th Congress essentially came to an end shortly before midnight on Friday, Dec. 9, when the Senate passed a continuing budget resolution (CR) to keep the federal government funded and operating until April 28. The House of Representatives had passed the measure earlier in the week before adjourning for the year. President Barack Obama signed the CR into law early on Dec. 10.

With this ending comes the expiration of all unpassed bills, including Sen. Tom Carper's (D-DE) iPost bill, S. 2051, as well as H.R. 5714, Rep. Jason Chaffetz' (R-UT) postal measure that included many reform provisions backed by NALC's coalition of postal unions, the U.S. Postal Service, various businesses and key lawmakers. Both bills were promising, but they needed more work.

"Our coalition made good progress toward crafting a solid consensus reform bill that all parties could agree on," NALC President Fredric Rolando said, "and we have high hopes that we can take that progress and build on it in the 115th Congress."

This progress was aided by the three resolutions in the House of Representatives—H.Res. 12, H.Res. 28 and H.Res. 54—that garnered majority bipartisan support.

"More than half of the voting members of House of Representatives

went on record to support six-day mail delivery, continued door delivery of the mail for those who receive it that way now, and a return to acceptable service standards," Rolando said. "That bodes well for us as we enter 2017, and we hope that similar resolutions will be introduced soon after Congress begins its work."

While some faces in both chambers have changed following the Nov. 8 elections, the leadership picture in the House and Senate remains largely the same. Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (R-WI) will continue in that role, as will Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) as minority leader. As reported in *The Postal Record* in December, Chaffetz stays on as chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee—which has Postal Service jurisdiction—and Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-MD) will continue to serve as that committee's ranking member.

In the Senate, Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY) will hold on to his seat as majority leader. Former Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) retired at the end of the 114th Congress; his replacement in that role is Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY). On the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, which has USPS jurisdiction, Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI) remains as chairman. Sen. Carper will stay on the committee, but replacing

him as ranking member there is Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO).

"Senator McCaskill is a strong supporter of the Postal Service," Rolando said, noting that her state is home to Hallmark Cards. In 2015, for example, McCaskill was a principal co-sponsor of a bill to restore overnight mail delivery standards for local mail; the year before, she joined several of her colleagues to raise objections to a postal reform bill that was moving through the Senate at the time (and that ultimately went unpassed). She told a hearing on that bill that she believes six-day delivery is USPS' competitive advantage.

'Contract' talk

Meanwhile, President-elect Donald Trump will be sworn in as the 45th president of the United States on Jan. 20. Letter carriers will be among the many keeping watch to find out what will happen with Trump's so-called "Contract with the American Voter" plan for his first 100 days in office, a plan released before he was elected on Nov. 8.

Item 2 on Trump's list is "a hiring freeze on all federal employees to reduce federal workforce through attrition (exempting military, public safety and public health)," something he has said his administration will "immediately pursue" on the first day of his term of office.



There will be no Branch Items, State Summaries or Retiree Reports in the February 2017 *Postal Record*. That edition will be the special annual tribute issue honoring contributors to the Letter Carrier Political Fund during 2016.

The Postal Service is off-budget and receives no tax money—paying for its operations through the sale of postage and postal products—so Trump’s freeze should not extend to USPS. Our lawyers and our lobbyists already are working to ensure that it does not.

Former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-GA), a prominent Trump advisor, told *The Washington Post* that the incoming president probably would take his government-shrinking cues from Gov. Scott Walker (R-WI). Walker’s playbook has included legislation that stripped public employee unions in that state of their collective-bargaining rights and forced them to pay more out-of-pocket for pension and health care benefits.

“From the looks of it, federal employees—letter carriers included—will have to play defense in the coming years,” President Rolando said.

Trump advisors told the newspaper that a selective hiring freeze might be on the table, targeting agencies disliked by some lawmakers from the Republican Party, which holds the majority in the House and Senate. The president does not need Congress’ approval for a hiring freeze—an executive order or basic instructions to federal agencies is usually all that’s needed.

Meanwhile, Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Johnson told the *Post* that he intends to get in touch with federal employee unions as his committee works on what he called “long-overdue reforms to our civil service.”

“While it’s unclear how the new Congress will affect letter carriers and the Postal Service in the coming months,” President Rolando said, “it has been clear for years that our craft and our employer have been held in high esteem, judging by public opinion polls and the strong majority bipartisan support that various postal resolutions have enjoyed.

“The Postal Service is decidedly non-partisan,” the president added. “It doesn’t receive a dime of taxpayer dollars, yet reaches every urban and rural community in the country. And with its roots in the Constitution and with nearly one quarter of letter carriers having served in the military, our employer should have broad appeal among conservatives. Nevertheless, we will all need to stay on constant guard for any moves that could threaten our service, our jobs and our collective-bargaining rights, and we will all have to raise our voices in Congress to help protect our interests.”

Labor secretary pick raises concerns

On Dec. 8, President-elect Trump announced his selection for secretary of labor: Andy Puzder, chief executive officer of CKE Restaurants Holdings Inc., the parent company of Carl’s Jr. and Hardee’s.

“Andy Puzder’s nomination is one of many Trump Cabinet appointments that are in direct conflict with the rhetoric of his campaign,” AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said in a statement. “The president-elect campaigned on standing up for working people, yet his actions thus far have undermined these claims.”

Puzder is on record as opposing the Department of Labor’s overtime rule and as objecting to efforts to increase the minimum wage.

“Mr. Puzder’s long track record inspires deep skepticism,” Trumka said. “It’s a track record that raises serious concerns about his qualifications to live up to the promises of the president-elect’s campaign. Mr. Trump will never meet those promises by surrounding himself with people—like Mr. Puzder—whose values are completely out of step with America’s workers.”

The New York Times reported that Puzder and his wife gave more than \$300,000 to Trump’s campaign and to the Republican National Committee during the 2016 election cycle.

Noting that Puzder, like all Cabinet nominees, will be subject to Senate confirmation, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) told *USA Today* that Puzder’s nomination is “the surest sign yet that the next Cabinet will be looking out for the billionaires and special interests, instead of America’s working class.”

In the news media

NALC continues its efforts to educate the news media and the public about postal issues.

A Nov. 14 commentary piece in *The Hill*, published the day before USPS released its annual financial report, predicted the report would show, among other things, billion-dollar losses. The piece also warned of a potential “taxpayer bailout.”

The Hill ran a rebuttal two weeks later by President Rolando, who pointed out that USPS made \$610 million in operating profit in Fiscal Year 2016 and noted that the figure would have been \$1.6 billion had it not been for a PRC-mandated stamp price rollback halfway through the fiscal year. Rolando also wrote in his piece that the losses mentioned in the initial commentary were largely the result of the charge for pre-funding of future retiree health benefits.

“Given that the Postal Service is based in the Constitution,” Rolando wrote, “is consistently rated the public’s most-trusted federal agency and delivers 47 percent of the world’s mail, I appreciate the opportunity to provide some additional perspective on this American treasure.”

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