News

NALC activists continue lobbying efforts to support meaningful postal reform

With two postal reform bills awaiting further consideration in the House of Representatives, letter carrier activists have been hard at work educating and informing House members about what postal services mean to legislators' districts. As a result, NALC's three priority resolutions—calling for the preservation of six-day mail delivery, door delivery and high service standards—have seen impressive results only a few months into the 115th Congress. By April 7, activists had achieved a key milestone.

NALC President Fredric Rolando thanked members from Ohio who traveled to Washington, DC, to explain the need for postal reform to their representatives in Congress.

"Thanks in large part to the efforts of NALC members," NALC President Fredric Rolando said, "House Resolution 28—urging the House of Representatives to take all appropriate measures to ensure the continuation of door delivery for business and residential customers—now has a bipartisan majority of co-sponsors."

At press time, 218 House members from both parties had signed on to the measure, which was reintroduced two days into the 115th Congress by Reps. Susan Davis (D-CA), David Joyce (R-OH) and Peter King (R-NY). Gettingf 218 co-sponsors is an impressive and important accomplishment," Rolando said, "especially this early in this legislative session."Many House and Senate resolutions never achieve a majority, much less a bipartisan majority, and those that do reach that important milestone often take an entire two-year congressional session to achieve it.

At press time, the other two resolutions—H.Res. 15 (six-day mail delivery) and H.Res. 31 (service standards)—had 166 and 156 co-sponsors, respectively, putting these resolutions also on track for a majority with continued efforts by NALC activists.

Although resolutions are not binding, meaning that they do not carry the force of law, they do send a signal to leadership in Congress about what the outcome of a vote could look like if a bill or measure came up for consideration. For example, with 218 members of Congress demonstrating support for door delivery service, leaders might be less inclined to push legislation diminishing such service.

Last Congress, these three resolutions averaged about 230 bipartisan co-sponsors each, so our work is far from done, and with a postal reform bill in the queue for continued consideration in the House, NALC activists must help ensure support for services through these resolutions. Visit the Legislative and Political Affairs page at nalc.org for more information and download the NALC Member App for continued updates and push notifications on the subject.

Trump releases budget summary

In March, President Donald Trump released a so-called "skinny budget" for Fiscal Year 2018, which begins on Oct. 1. This trimmed-down outline defines very broadly the priorities of the new president. (As is customary with a new administration, a more detailed budget is expected to follow this month to kick off budget season in Washington.)

The budget process has taken a back seat to other priorities in Congress, such as finalizing FY 2017 spending before the most recent temporary spending bill expired on April 28, and the weeks-long effort to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, which resulted instead in the withdrawal of the proposed bill.

As a result, things are behind schedule, but NALC expects to see more details on the administration's budget priorities soon. The union's focus will be on how the budget relates to the Postal Service and the treatment of active and retired federal employees.

In recent years, White House budget proposals often called for reducing mail delivery frequency from six to five days, or for a shift from door delivery to centralized and curbside delivery. NALC activists have had to work to defeat these proposals while also opposing congressional budgets that proposed cuts to workers' compensation benefits and called for increased pension contributions from federal employees.

Thankfully, administration budget requests are generally messaging blueprints that signal to Congress the direction a president would like to go. The ideas are merely suggestions for the House and Senate to consider as they work through their respective budget processes.

Over the past few years, NALC and the federal union community have been able to fight back against most of these ideas. Activists must be prepared to help fight them off once again, since the Trump administration has set a goal of making $54 billion in domestic spending cuts.

Bargaining update

As this issue of *The Postal Record* was going to press, NALC President Fredric Rolando and the NALC's contract negotiations team were working tirelessly to close a deal on a tentative collective-bargaining agreement with the Postal Service. NALC remains determined to achieve its goals, whether through continued bargaining or, if need be, interest arbitration. Although difficult and time-consuming, the discussions have continued to be productive. However, the process remains fragile.

Members should look to the *NALC Bulletin* and the NALC website for the very latest news. President Rolando will also use the NALC Member App to make any announcements on a new contract. Download it to your smartphone today.

For example, should the president's budget recommendations gain traction in a House or Senate budget request, a number of programs and grants under the Department of Labor's control could see cuts or even outright elimination. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) training grants that help prevent on-the-job injuries and deaths are among the things that potentially could be wiped out.

President Rolando noted that such cuts could cost money in the future. "Making such cuts now could wind up costing employers and employees even more money down the road," he said. "Even worse, it could significantly increase the risk of workplace injuries."

A look ahead

In December, during the final weeks of the Obama administration, Congress was unable to reach agreement on a federal budget but managed to avoid a federal shutdown by agreeing on a continuing resolution to keep the government operating at existing funding levels until April 28.

Since convening in January, Congress has remained largely focused on adjusting to the new administration and its campaign promise to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, an undertaking that ate up most discussion on Capitol Hill but eventually fizzled out. At press time, Congress faced the harsh reality that, up to that point, it had failed to address how it planned to fund the government beyond April 28.

Despite this pressing challenge, representatives and senators went home for a two-week recess in April, leaving legislators only a week or so to negotiate federal government spending levels beyond April upon their return to Washington. While this magazine was being printed, a government shutdown was a threat, creating uncertainty for agencies and federal employees. (Of course, the off-budget Postal Service would remain open even if the rest of the government ceased operations.) With the rocky start in the budget process and the lack of clarity as to how Congress will prioritize spending, letter carriers need to remain vigilant in case Congress targets their pay and benefits.

Overtime rule in limbo

An Obama-era overtime rule could essentially be dead if the Trump administration opts not to defend it in court.

Under federal law, employees who make less than $23,600 a year must be paid time-and-a-half once they work more than 40 hours in a week—unless they have a collective-bargaining agreement that makes some other arrangement.

Last May, Obama's Labor Department rolled out a plan to raise that figure to $47,600 a year starting Dec. 1—essentially making more than 4 million additional working people eligible for overtime. The new regulation called for reviews every three years to ensure that overall wage growth did not gradually erode the law's overtime guarantees.

In November, however, a federal judge halted the new rule before it could take effect, on the grounds that only Congress could make such a change. The Obama administration appealed that ruling in December while trying, unsuccessfully, to get a quick hearing on the matter before Trump was sworn in as president.

The current administration has indicated that it plans to withdraw the White House's appeal and allow the federal judge's ruling to stand, contradicting its claims to be looking after ordinary working people.

"We've seen that what happens in the private labor market can often have wide-ranging effects on our own pay, benefits and working conditions, including the ones we negotiate with the Postal Service," Rolando said. "We'll continue to watch how this situation unfolds in the coming weeks and months and work with our allies in the labor movement to fight for overtime fairness."

Alexander Acosta, Trump's nominee for labor secretary and a former member of the National Labor Relations Board, noted in a Senate confirmation hearing that the overtime rule had not been updated in a long time.

"It's unfortunate that rules that involve dollar values can sometimes go more than a decade, sometimes 15 years, without being updated," Acosta said, "because life does get more expensive."

Acosta's nomination had not been approved by the Senate by the time this magazine went to press. Trump's first nominee as labor secretary, Hardee's

Letter carriers from Maryland, the District of Columbia, Virginia and West Virginia attended a rap session at NALC Headquarters before heading to Capitol Hill to lobby their members of Congress.

Legislative and political organizers

NALC President Fredric Rolando has announced the hiring of three members as legislative and political organizers (LPOs). LPOs function as a resource to the state associations and letter carrier congressional liaisons to advance the legislative and political agenda of the NALC. The three hires are: John Beaumont of San Francisco, CA Branch 214; Eddie Davidson of Durham, NC Branch 382; and Tony Perconte of Scotch Plains, NJ Branch 4102. (For more on the appointments, see Executive Vice President Brian Renfroe's column on page 32.)

Beaumont

Davidson

Perconte

CEO Andrew Puzder, withdrew himself from consideration for the job after his record for labor law violations was exposed by the AFL-CIO and other organizations.

Retirement savings threatened

A delay in the implementation of another Obama-era rule is costing working people an estimated $46 million a day.

The "fiduciary rule" was written by the Obama administration to require financial advisors to work for the best interests of their clients, not for their own economic well-being. Prior to its implementation, such advisors often encouraged workers and their families to invest in high-cost or risky mutual funds and other assets—often to make more profits for themselves.

Without this fiduciary rule in place, advisers are free to put their own interests ahead of their clients when providing retirement investment counseling.

"Blocking this rule will leave millions of Americans vulnerable to conflicted advice that produces lucrative commissions and fees to advisers while exposing savers to excessive costs, poor performance and unnecessary risks," President Rolando said.

In 2015, the White House Council of Economic Advisers (CEA) estimated that conflicted advice for individual retirement account (IRA) mutual fund investments and annuities costs Americans $17 billion per year. Over 30 years, the CEA concluded that a retiree who received conflicted advice when rolling over a 401(k) to an IRA could run out of savings five years earlier than someone who did not receive bad advice.

Caving in to Wall Street special interests who oppose the new rule, President Trump ordered the Labor Department to "review" the rule. In response, the department pushed the rule's implementation date to June 9 while it conducts the review. There are fears that the Labor Department will kill the rule altogether.

"When it comes to our hard-earned money—when it comes to saving for retirement—financial advisers should have a fiduciary responsibility to provide us with sound expert advice," AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said in April.

Trumka and Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) have unveiled a "Retirement Ripoff Counter" that tracks how much money American workers lose each moment the fiduciary rule is delayed.

"That money matters," Warren said. "It's the difference between retiring with dignity and having to stretch every dollar as far as it will go."

Visit saveourretirement.org to learn more about what you can do to help get this protective rule implemented.

In the news media

NALC President Fredric Rolando's letter calling for legislation that would strengthen quality mail service ran in mid-April in three northern Wisconsin newspapers—*Amery Free Press*, *Burnett County Sentinel* and Osceola's *The Sun*—as well as in Minnesota's *Country Messenger*. Rolando's letter, in response to a recent column written by the newspapers' publisher, explained the value of the Postal Service and letter carriers and the facts about postal finances.

On April 3, *The Hill* ran an op-ed by Rolando that explained why "USPS enjoys strong support both in rural and urban areas and across the ideological spectrum." The commentary responded to an earlier piece by Citizens Against Government Waste that criticized postal reform efforts.

The president's piece in the Fenton, MI-based *Tri-County Times* ran on March 24. The piece provided information about the U.S. Postal Service in response to an earlier news article.

Letters from Idaho State Association President John Paige ran in the *Idaho State Journal* and Twin Falls' *Times-News* on April 3, in the *Idaho Press Tribune* on April 5 and in the *Idaho Statesman* on April 17.

Visit Postal Facts at nalc.org to find links to these pieces and many others. PR

Legislative visits

Letter carrier activists from Ohio visited Washington, DC, March 29-30 to lobby their members of Congress on issues important to NALC. Ohio Rep. Bill Johnson (R-6th) spoke to the Ohioans at an evening reception on March 29 (pictured at l). On April 3, activists from the District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia held a lobbying day of their own on Capitol Hill.

Left: Ohio letter carriers spoke with Rep. Bob Latta (R-5th) about the bipartisan efforts to pass reform legislation.

Above: NALC members from Maryland met with Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-8th).