



News from Washington

House, Senate still working to pass budget resolution



NALC President Fredric Rolando

As noted in NALC Executive Vice President Brian Renfroe's column (see Page 36), there is a lot of activity on Capitol Hill as Congress takes on tax reform and the 2018 federal budget—massive undertakings that will require some congressional gymnastics to accomplish. If Congress wants to reduce taxes, legislators will need to find a way to pay for it so that the government can continue to operate. NALC, along with the entire federal employee community, is keeping a close eye on every step of the process.

On Oct. 5, the House of Representatives passed a budget resolution for Fiscal Year 2018 that contained a number of significant hits to the retirement benefits of all federal workers—letter carriers included (see Page 36 for details). However, the Senate had not yet completed its consideration of the budget as this issue was going to press.

“Over the past several years,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said, “Congress has tried time and again, and occasionally has succeeded, to slash federal employees’ hard-earned pension benefits, all in the name of the legislative priority of the day: deficit reduction, tax reform and so on. And now they’re at it again.”

In the end, the goal is for the House and Senate to strike a deal on which budget cuts, if any, will help them move a tax reform package forward. This means that letter carriers need to continually ask their members of Congress to oppose any legislation that takes aim at federal compensation and benefits.

Call your legislators in Washington—it’s easy

Letter carrier activists who have never before called their legislative representatives in Washington are often surprised at how easy it is—not just to get through, but also to make their voices heard.

“Chances are you’ll simply speak with a trained office staff member whose job is to take down your information and pass it along to your lawmaker—their boss—and the entire interaction might last no more than one minute,” President Rolando said.

To get started, first decide whom you would like to call: your House representative or one of your two senators (or perhaps, eventually, all three).

Next, dial the Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121 and be ready to provide your ZIP code to get connected.

Be prepared to give your name and your city to whoever answers—and be ready to leave your entire message as a voicemail if you’re calling after hours.

Visit nalc.org/budgetbattle2017 for tips on what to say.

That web page also contains links for looking up phone numbers for the district offices of your two senators and your House representative. Deliver your same message over the phone to staff members at those locations.

“Once you find out just how painless the process is,” Rolando said, “try to get others to call, too—such as your family members, your co-workers and your friends.” Point them to the web address above for help with crafting their messages.

Want to have an even greater impact? Use the links on that web page to locate legislators’ district and Washington mailing addresses, then mail a letter bearing the same information you conveyed in your phone calls.

NALC Member App

You can join NALC’s fight against unfair budget cuts by using the free NALC Member App for Apple and Android smartphones. Visit nalc.org/app to find download links.

After you download the app, enter your home ZIP code when asked.

Tap “Gov’t Affairs” at the bottom of the screen. Under “My congressional

directory” are links to your House and Senate representatives.

Tap the “Learn More” link to be connected to representatives’ official web pages, where you can locate their district office addresses and phone numbers.

Letter carriers and the Hatch Act

NALC encourages all members to be engaged in a wide range of political activities to advance the letter carrier agenda.

But it is crucial to remember that all active letter carriers, career and non-career alike, are federal employees, and your political activities are governed by the Hatch Act—including online activities that involve social media (for example, Facebook and Twitter) as well as e-mail.

In general: Whenever you engage in any partisan political activity, be off the clock, out of uniform (and government vehicles) and away from the workplace, and make sure that the activity is in a permissible category.

Visit nalc.org/hatch to learn more about the Hatch Act. If you have questions or concerns that are not covered by that web page, do not hesitate to first contact the Office of Special Counsel by e-mail at hatchact@osc.gov or by phone at 800-85-HATCH.

House approves TSP modernization bill

On Oct. 13, the House of Representatives passed the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) Modernization Act of 2017 (H.R. 3031), which was introduced in June by Rep. Mark Meadows (R-NC), chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform’s Subcommittee on Government Operations, and by Oversight Committee Ranking Member Elijah Cummings (D-MD).

The legislation calls for eliminating restrictions on age-based TSP withdrawals, allowing for active federal

employees older than 59½ to make multiple age-based withdrawals while still working.

It also would allow retirees to make multiple, partial post-separation withdrawals.

Further, it would allow participants to stop quarterly or annual payments, permit periodic withdrawals to be changed at any point during the year, and save the option to purchase an annuity while recovering monthly benefits.

“[H.R. 3031] will go a long way in facilitating needed updates to the Thrift Savings Plan program, providing more flexibility for retirees and allowing TSP recipients to keep taking advantage of benefits,” Meadows said.

“Providing more flexibility will allow federal employees and retirees to more easily access their retirement savings to address emergencies or life events and encourage them to retain their assets in the TSP which has one of the lowest administrative fees in the industry,” Cummings added.

The Senate’s companion bill, S. 873, was introduced by Sens. Rob Portman (R-OH) and Tom Carper (D-DE)

in April. It still has not been taken up by the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee.

NALC will continue to closely monitor both bills’ progress.

Trump disbands federal-level labor-management council

On Sept. 29, President Donald Trump issued an executive order to shut down the National Council on Federal Labor-Management Relations, a body created by President Barack Obama in 2009 to help ensure that the labor movement had a voice in the White House in discussions about issues facing working people.

As letter carriers, we’re fortunate to be covered by a collective-bargaining agreement that helps keep a dialog open between employees and managers. The administration’s order doesn’t take that away from us, but it does remove a valuable resource for our brothers and sisters in the federal workforce—the latest in a series of Trump administration attacks on federal workers. **PR**

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