News

News from Washington

Comprehensive postal reform unlikely in the 116th Congress

The House of Representatives has passed 10 of the 12 spending bills, while the remaining two passed out of committee but have yet to be taken up on the House floor. The Senate, meanwhile, approved 10 of its 12 spending bills through the Appropriations Committee, though none of those had reached the Senate floor. Subsequently, though, in late September a continuing resolution was signed into law to fund federal agencies at current levels through Nov. 21, giving lawmakers more time to address the appropriations debate for fiscal year 2020 (FY 2020).

As this issue went to print, congressional and appropriations leadership negotiations were in the works to finalize a long-term funding deal and avoid another government shutdown. Talks could provide a pathway to begin "preconferencing" all 12 bills. Differences between appropriators have boiled down to subcommittee allocations, including proposals that provide insufficient increases to Labor, Health and Human Services and Education; and to political disagreements, including proposals to provide significant funding to build a wall on the southern border, among others.

Regardless of the outcome of the yearly task of funding the government, once this is concluded it could spell the end of most legislation for the rest of the 116th Congress. Much attention is likely to be focused on the impeachment inquiry. Additionally, 2020 will be an election year for the entire House, a third of the Senate and for the president, meaning that more time will be spent on campaigning and less on legislating. This could mean bad news for a lot of bills, including those prioritized by NALC.

Postal reform update

As of press time, a postal reform bill had not been introduced in Congress, and while talks continue behind the scenes in both the House and the Senate, the prospects of a comprehensive piece of legislation being introduced, advanced through both chambers and signed by the president are slim to nil. The difficulties in finding bipartisan agreement stem partly from the split in party leadership between the two chambers.

In the absence of strong postal reform, NALC has focused on the USPS Fairness Act (H.R. 2382), and seen its momentum continue to rise. The bill would repeal the mandate that USPS pre-fund decades' worth of health benefits for its future retirees that was contained in the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act (PAEA), adopted in 2006.

The repeal of the pre-funding mandate is key to achieving meaningful postal reform—because it would free the Postal Service to invest in its infrastructure and better utilize its universal network to serve business and residential customers. Even if a more comprehensive bill may struggle during the 116th Congress, enactment of H.R. 2382 would help improve Postal Service finances and put lawmakers in a good position to advance a broader postal reform bill in the next Congress, if not this one.

H.R. 2382 continues to add co-sponsors to its already sizable bipartisan majority support. Introduced on April 28 by Reps. Peter DeFazio (D-OR), Tom Reed (R-NY), Xochitl Torres Small (D-NM) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), H.R. 2382 would eliminate a mandate that has cost an average of $5.4 billion annually since 2007, while accounting for 92 percent of USPS's reported losses over the last 12 years and 100 percent over the last six years. Absent this burden, which applies to no other federal agency or private company, USPS would have recorded a surplus of nearly $4 billion since 2013.

As this issue of *The Postal Record* was going to press, the bill had 269 co-sponsors.

NALC members are encouraged to check whether their member of Congress is a co-sponsor. If not, you can reach their office by calling the Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121 and asking for their support and co-sponsorship. While there is not currently a Senate companion bill, there is talk of one being introduced soon. When that happens, NALC will encourage all letter carriers to contact the two senators from their state and ask them to co-sponsor the bill, too.

Additionally, NALC supports five resolutions introduced in Congress. While non-binding, these resolutions send a strong message about the breadth of support for USPS and its mission.

While the priority resolutions on door delivery (H. Res. 23), six-day mail delivery (H. Res. 54) and opposing the privatization of USPS (H. Res. 33/S. Res. 99) all have achieved majority support with more than 218 co-sponsors in the House or (in the case of S. Res. 99) more than 50 in the Senate, the resolution on restoration of service standards (H. Res. 60) still needs more co-sponsors.

Another notable bill NALC is tracking is H.R. 141, the Social Security Fairness Act, introduced by Rep. Rodney Davis (R-IL). The bill would repeal the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) titles of the Social Security Act. As of press time, it had 203 co-sponsors.

NALC mourns passing of Rep. Elijah Cummings

The National Association of Letter Carriers sent its heartfelt condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of Rep. Elijah Cummings of Baltimore, following his death on Oct. 17.

"Congressman Cummings was an unyielding supporter of government workers," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "Because of his leadership role on the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, we worked closely with him for many years on postal issues and admired his deep knowledge of, and commitment to, the U.S. Postal Service and its employees."

Letter carriers can find a useful fact sheet on pre-funding and the USPS Fairness Act on NALC's Government Affairs page by clicking on the Legislative Action Center on the right-hand side of the page. This information and more legislative tools are available for your Android or iPhone smartphone through the NALC Member App.

House advances PRO Act

On Sept. 25, the House Committee on Labor and Education marked up and advanced the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act (H.R. 2474), legislation that would increase protections for workers' rights to organize and bargain for higher wages, better benefits and safer working conditions.

Specifically, the PRO Act would:

- Establish penalties for predatory corporations that violate workers' rights or misclassify workers as supervisors and independent contractors.
- Strengthen workers' rights to strike for basic workplace improvements, including higher wages and better working conditions.
- Create a mediation and arbitration process to ensure that corporations and newly formed unions reach a first contract.
- Authorize unions and employers to negotiate agreements that allow unions to collect fair-share fees that cover the costs of representation.
- Streamline National Labor Relation Board (NLRB) procedures to secure workers' rights and effectively prevent violations.
- Protect the integrity of union elections against captive audience meetings called by employers to intimidate workers.

The introduction of this bill follows decades of stagnant wages for the majority of American workers, as well as poor working conditions and attacks on unions and workers' rights.

"America's workers are the backbone of our economy and the foundation of our strength, organizing and mobilizing over generations for higher wages, better health care, safer working conditions and stronger retirement security for everyone," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) said.

"The introduction of the PRO Act is a powerful statement of support for America's workers," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "All Americans deserve the right not simply to stand together and negotiate a fair return on our work, but to have that right protected and enforceable through the court of law. For too long, corporations and the wealthiest few have been prioritized to the detriment of our nation's labor force. NALC supports the PRO Act and encourages Democrats and Republicans alike to stand up for the American people by passing this legislation."

NALC will monitor its progression through the House and Senate. The House bill currently has 210 co-sponsors. Should it be brought to the floor for a vote and pass, it will proceed to the Republican-controlled Senate, where it is unlikely to be considered. However, winning House passage still is important—it builds momentum and will help us make the case in next year's Senate elections that union rights are important to voters.

U.S. to remain in UPU

In late September, the third Extraordinary Congress of the Universal Postal Union (UPU) held an emergency meeting in response to the White House's threats to pull the United States out of the nearly 150-year-old organization, which would risk jeopardize the entire structure of international mail service. Ahead of the emergency meeting, the postal workforce sent a letter to Congress (viewable on the NALC Government Affairs webpage) requesting members to urge the White House not to withdraw the United States from the UPU. In the talks, the UPU agreed to restructure international postal fees.

UPU Director-General Bishar Hussein had warned at the start of the meeting that U.S. withdrawal from the UPU would be a "nightmare scenario" that would upend global mail and see U.S. stamps fail to be recognized abroad, among many other undesirable consequences.

While Peter Navarro, the White House's trade adviser, pushed for a system that would allow a pricing free-for-all when it came to postal fees, a compromise deal was reached following two days of talks. This deal will allow countries that receive more than 75,000 metric tons of mail a year to start phasing in gradually higher rates in January 2021 over a five-year period, an agreement far less disruptive than that advocated by Navarro.

"Once a country declares their rate, exporting countries will have to factor that cost; it means that cost will be transferred to the person sending that item," Hussein said. "When you are in a country and you buy items overseas, the end customer will definitely have to pay a higher price."

The United States now will be able to start setting new postal fees in July of next year, before they begin to take effect in January 2021.

NALC participates in collective-bargaining and pension rallies

Standing in solidarity with the labor movement this fall, NALC participated in rallies protesting a series of executive orders attacking the collective-bargaining rights of non-postal federal unions and urging Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) to put the "Rehabilitation for Multiemployer Pensions Act of 2019," also known as the "Butch Lewis Act" (S. 2254), to a vote in the Senate. That bill would create a loan program to stabilize failing multiemployer plans, to avoid a potential pension crisis and to ensure that commitments made to retirees and workers will be met.

These rallies, led by the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) and the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), were attended by numerous members of other unions, who showed their support for workers' rights and earned benefits.

"NALC is proud to support our brothers and sisters to fight against those who are working to take away fair returns for our work and our freedoms to join together in union," President Rolando said.

In the media

NALC Chief of Staff Jim Sauber was quoted in a Sep. 23 article by *Barron's* that covered the controversy surrounding the potential, but later averted, U.S. exit from the Universal Postal Union.

A number of outlets covered the celebratory ceremony and unveiling of "Wailin' Mailman" Buck Hill's mural in Washington, DC (see last month's *Postal Record*). Among the media outlets that reported on the event were CapitalBOP.com, WAMU 88.5 FM and *Linn's Stamp News*. PR

Postmaster General announces retirement

On Oct. 16, U.S. Postmaster General Megan Brennan announced that she would be retiring on Jan. 31, 2020. NALC President Fredric Rolando issued the following statement on the retirement announcement:

"NALC congratulates Postmaster General Brennan on her retirement after 33 years of public service. We extend our best wishes in her future endeavors."