



News from Washington

Congress and White House at odds over postal economic relief

While letter carriers haven't missed a beat serving the public during a global pandemic, the same cannot be said for the 535 members of Congress, who have struggled to operate and legislate for much of the last four months due to COVID-19.

Both chambers have been in and out of Washington over that period, grappling with their agendas and with the definition of a "must-do" item. In both chambers, virtual hearings have become the norm, but their priorities and approach to governing in this environment couldn't be more different.

In a historic move in mid-May, the House altered its rules to allow for remote voting by proxy and for official remote committee proceedings during a public health emergency, to shield its members from back-and-forth travel from their districts. While some senators on both sides of the aisle, including Rob Portman (R-OH) and Dick Durbin (D-IL), called for the option of remote voting, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) flatly rejected any discussion of the matter, opting for traditional in-person voting.

The differences between the chambers reflects continuing tensions between House Democratic leadership and Senate Republican leadership. Those differences continue to grow, especially as the November election gets closer and each chamber becomes more consumed with retaining its majority in what is shaping up to be a highly divisive presidential election.

Upon return from a two-week recess for the Fourth of July holiday, both chambers are expected to tackle significant issues such as additional COVID-19 relief, FY 2021 funding, nominations in the Senate and, per-

haps most contentious, an extension of additional unemployment benefits contained in the first relief package, which are set to expire on July 31. And so, the last two weeks of July will have a lot in store for legislators and leave Congress's schedule beyond the summer unclear.

HEROES Act update

In the June issue of *The Postal Record*, we reported on the introduction of the fourth legislative package to provide economic relief to the country in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. That measure, the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions, or "HEROES" Act (H.R. 6800), passed the House and was immediately ignored by the Senate.

The \$3 trillion package contains many provisions and measures, which can be read about in last month's *Postal Record* or online at NALC's "Government Affairs" page.

With regard to the Postal Service, the HEROES Act provides \$25 billion in direct appropriations to help USPS weather the financial crisis brought on by the pandemic, in addition to the removal of restrictions placed in the CARES Act on the \$10 billion in added USPS borrowing authority from the U.S. Treasury. Also included in the package is the creation of a "Heroes Fund," which would provide hazard or premium pay of \$13 per hour premium pay on top of regular wages up to \$10,000 for essential front-line workers, including letter carriers and other postal employees.

Senate Republican leaders flatly rejected the overall measure from the House and, as it relates to the postal-specific provisions, have decided to take a wait-and-see approach. This

was recently confirmed in a June letter from Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Chairman Ron Johnson (R-WI), House Committee on Oversight and Reform (COR) Ranking Member Jim Jordan (R-OH) and COR Subcommittee on Government Operations Ranking Member Jody Hice (R-GA), who questioned the Postal Service on its financials during the pandemic in an attempt to downplay its need for financial assistance.

As the House and Senate negotiate a path forward, including the issue of providing financial relief to the Postal Service, the elephant in the room is the overwhelming public perception that the Postal Service has had a positive effect during the pandemic. The Harris Poll recently found that USPS ranked No. 1 among corporate entities that "played a truly essential role during the crisis," beating out UPS, Amazon, Walmart and Purell.

Negotiations on the next package will require the Senate to make its positions clear on other pandemic-related provisions contained in the HEROES Act as well, including the other postal measures, the absence of an enforceable national safety standard from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the preservation of health coverage for people at risk of losing their employer-provided health insurance, an extension of unemployment benefits and the shoring up of our nation's voting systems. The voting systems need assistance, as recent state primaries have shown problems in guaranteeing that voters can safely exercise their constitutional right to vote amid this pandemic.

Senate Republican leaders have repeatedly stated that any action will wait until the end of the month, assert-

President Rolando appoints RWCA

NALC President Fredric Rolando has named Doug Lawrence of Syracuse, NY Branch 134 as a regional workers' compensation assistant (RWCA). Previously, Lawrence was detailed by Headquarters on several occasions to assist members with their workers' compensation claims.

Lawrence began his postal career as a city carrier in Syracuse in 1997. He served his branch as chief steward and arbitration advocate, before being elected branch vice president in 2016, a position he held until his appointment. He graduated from the NALC Leadership Academy in 2013.

RWCAs work in conjunction with the national business agents' offices to assist members with workers' compensation claims, strengthening the capacity of branches to provide union representation to NALC members. **PR**



Doug Lawrence

ing that they want to know both how the \$3 trillion spent thus far is being used and how additional relief will be paid for. Negotiations between the House and Senate to put together the next package will take place on an abbreviated timeline, likely from July 20 to Aug. 7. Meanwhile, NALC's outreach continues.

NALC call to action

In these challenging times, letter carriers remain active, reminding members of Congress of the critical importance of what we do every day. As this publication went to print, more than 150,000 messages had gone to members of Congress on both sides of the aisle. In addition, through heroesdelivering.com, the public has sent nearly 50,000 messages on our behalf.

As we turn up the volume in July, letter carriers should continue contacting their members of Congress to urge support for postal funding in the next stimulus package. Let Congress know that the Postal Service doesn't need more debt and that there is overwhelming voter support for temporary federal funding. Visit the NALC "Government Affairs" page and follow links to the Legislative Action Center to deliver your message to Washington.

In addition, letter carriers should encourage their friends and families to visit heroesdelivering.com, which provides information to the public on the importance of USPS and the need to keep it strong during this pandemic. It gives readers an easy way to contact their legislators and call on them to support funding for the Postal Service in the next legislative package.

New leadership on postal Board of Governors and USPS

As this magazine was going to press, Louis DeJoy began his term as the postmaster general (PMG) and chief executive officer of the U.S. Postal Service. In addition, Lee Moak and William Zollars were undergoing Senate confirmation hearings to serve on the postal Board of Governors (BOG). The BOG has lacked a quorum since the resignation of Vice Chairman David Williams on April 30.

"The incoming leadership in the postmaster general position and on the Board of Governors comes at a challenging time for the Postal Service," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "We look forward to working with DeJoy, Zollars and Moak to ensure that letter carriers have a voice as important decisions are made in the coming months."

Congressional action on police reform introduced

In the midst of a pandemic and following weeks of civil unrest following the police killing of George Floyd and other people of color, Congress is shining a light on initiatives aimed at reforming policing.

Rep. Karen Bass (D-CA) and Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ), along with 164 House colleagues and 33 Senate colleagues, introduced the Justice in Policing Act of 2020 (H.R. 7120/S. 3912) in June. The bill calls for reforms to prevent the recurrence of what happened in Minnesota in May, when Floyd died as an officer knelt on his neck, and other incidents elsewhere.

The Justice in Policing Act would, among other provisions:

- Establish a national standard for the operation of police departments.
- Mandate data collection on police encounters.
- Reprogram existing funds to invest in transformative community-based policing programs.
- Streamline federal law to prosecute excessive force and establish independent prosecutors for police investigations.

Beyond those measures, the bill would improve police practices and training, ban choke holds and no-knock warrants, limit police use of military equipment and enforce the use of body cameras on uniformed officers. The legislation seeks to tackle systemic bias as part of the effort to build trust between law enforcement and local communities.

As of press time, no Republicans had co-sponsored the legislation; the party was instead working on its own police reform proposals. Senate Majority Leader McConnell had tapped Sen. Tim Scott (R-SC) to lead the chamber's effort, while Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH) was looking to release his own plan.

"The crisis of police violence against people of color in America is not just a problem for minorities," President Rolando said. "It is a crisis for all Americans that must be addressed. It requires all of us to accept the need for deep structural reform that respects the human rights of all while honoring the essential work of our police. Even as we battle a terrible pandemic and its economic effects, we must make that reform the vital work of our democracy."

NALC has not taken a direct position on this legislation or on police reform in general, but will continue to monitor the progress of this legislation. **PR**

In other news

Courts deny AFL-CIO petition to OSHA

On June 11, a federal appeals court rejected the AFL-CIO's request to require the Department of Labor (DOL) Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to issue an emergency temporary standard (ETS) on infection control in the workplace.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit found that, "in light of the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the regulatory tools that the OSHA has at its disposal to ensure that employers are maintaining hazard-free work environments... the OSHA reasonably determined that an ETS is not necessary at this time."

As noted above, the HEROES Act (H.R. 6800) would require the development of safety plans in the form of ETS to protect front-line workers, including employees in health care and emergency medical services, firefighters, other emergency responders and other employees with an occupational risk of exposure during the COVID-19 pandemic. The intent was to cover and protect all employees under OSHA instead of relying on OSHA guidance documents, which are mere suggestions to protect workers through the pandemic.

"We are very disappointed that three judges did not deem the lives of America's workers worthy of holding an argument or issuing a full opinion," AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said in a statement. "In fact, none of the other 'regulatory tools,' short of an ETS, require employers to do anything at all... An unprecedented pandemic calls for unprecedented action, and the court's action today fell woefully short of fulfilling its duty to ensure that the Occupational Safety and Health Act is enforced."

DOL rule to allow electronic delivery as default for retirement statements

Starting July 27, a new rule from the Department of Labor (DOL) will allow retirement plan administrators to use email, texts and websites as a default means to provide participants and beneficiaries the required documents about their retirement plans. The "Default Electronic Delivery by Employee Pension Benefit Plans under ERISA" rule from the DOL upends the current system, which provides hard-copy disclosures through the mail, but allows retirement plan participants and beneficiaries to opt in to e-delivery, if they would prefer.

On May 12, Reps. Morgan Griffith (R-VA) and Donald McEachin (D-VA) led a bipartisan letter signed by 47 members of Congress in support of preserving paper options for retirement documents. NALC supports the current system and appreciates the letter opposing this rule from this bipartisan group of lawmakers. The full text of the letter may be found at morgangriffith.house.gov/uploadedfiles/5.12.20_letter_omb_oira.pdf.

The new DOLA rule applies to private sector pension plans and not to CSRS and FERS. **PR**