



News from Washington

White House signs third COVID-19 stimulus package into law, next package in development; states look to vote-by-mail



Following extensive and tense negotiations between the House of Representatives and the Senate, the president signed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (H.R. 748) into law at the end of March.

The massive \$2.2 trillion response to the coronavirus pandemic provided more than \$500 billion in aid to corporations and included some support to our nation's hospitals, businesses, and some, but not all, industries harmed by the economic fallout from the virus. Also included in the final package was a major expansion of the federal-state unemployment insurance system as well as a one-time cash payment of up to \$1,200 per adult and \$500 per child, as well as many other relief provisions.

Unfortunately for letter carriers and the U.S. Postal Service, the package did not include direct relief to the USPS. Instead the law simply raised the agency's borrowing authority from the Treasury by \$10 billion. This will improve the Postal Service's liquidity for now, but at a cost of further indebtedness. The new debt authority comes with uncertain terms and conditions that are unlikely to be helpful to our employer or us. This "relief" is not nearly enough. As NALC President Fredric Rolando noted: "Congress will have no choice but to revisit relief of the Postal Service soon. The COVID-19 crisis is both a public health crisis and an economic crisis—and the U.S. Postal Service is a vitally important tool for combatting these twin calamities."

NALC leadership lobbied the House, Senate and administration aggressively in the lead-up to the bill's passage through both chambers of Congress.

Our goal was to ensure that the Postal Service and its workforce are protected from the public health threat and the economic fallout caused by the virus. To that end, NALC urged the Congress to directly appropriate funds to the Service to stave off a potential collapse, and to forgive its debt to the Treasury. NALC also reminded Congress of the urgent need to address the mandate to pre-fund retiree health care.

Throughout the process, there was a clear difference between House and Senate approaches to postal relief. In the House, Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) on March 23, proposed broad and aggressive measures to help USPS, similar to the aid offered to other major industries facing significant disruptions by the pandemic. Her proposal called for the elimination of the agency's current \$11 billion debt to the Treasury; resetting the Postal Service's borrowing authority to \$15 billion with an elimination of the current \$3 billion limit on new debt; provision of a one-time appropriation of \$25 billion to be available for use between now and September 2022; and a provision to prioritize the delivery of medical items and to make other operational adjustments in response to the coronavirus crisis.

In an additional postal-related matter, the House bill called for \$4 billion in funding, partly to expand vote-by-mail for this year's remaining primaries and the general election in November. The election security measure also included a national requirement for the right to cast a ballot by mail for every voter.

The initial Senate bill offered no relief to the Postal Service whatsoever, despite compelling information

provided by the Postal Service to the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee (HSGAC) and its chairman, Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI). That evidence showed that the sudden shutdown of major parts of the U.S. economy was sharply reducing mail volume and revenue for the Postal Service.

NALC and its allies in the mailing industry—unions and mailers alike—also weighed in, urging lawmakers to repeal the retiree health pre-funding mandate, a repeal plan already adopted by the House in February (H.R. 2382). Although the Postal Service has not received taxpayer appropriations since the 1980s—other than small ones to carry out congressionally requested activities related to military voting and free mail for the blind—NALC argued that the present crisis warrants such appropriations now.

In coordination with NALC and other stakeholders, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) wrangled with the administration’s lead negotiator, Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin, over the major elements of the \$2.2 trillion legislative package. Schumer pushed for major relief for the Postal Service. The ranking member of HSGAC, Sen. Gary Peters (D-MI), also sought to persuade Chairman Johnson that the USPS needed relief.

Johnson eventually conceded that direct aid was warranted and urged Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) to include a \$13 billion appropriation to the Postal Service in the stimulus legislation. Despite the Republican chairman’s support, the administration’s negotiating team, led by Mnuchin, rejected the urgent relief and opted only for a \$10 billion line of credit with “strings attached.” Even

with the conditional loan in place, the Postal Service is expected to run out of money by Sept. 30—threatening major disruptions in service.

With the third stimulus in the rearview mirror and national unemployment figures continuing to rise, conversations have already begun between the House and Senate on the next relief package. With lawmakers out of Washington and back in their states working, it is unclear as to the timing of the next stimulus package.

As the pandemic continues to shut down major parts of the U.S. economy—dramatically reducing mail volume and revenue for the Postal Service, NALC and allies will continue to lobby for stronger measures to protect USPS and the postal workforce. We will fight to ensure that the Postal Service is given financial assistance similar to what many private companies (airlines, hotels, etc.) have received.

NALC will actively engage Congress and the administration to address the urgent needs facing our employer. Letter carriers should check the NALC government affairs webpage for the most up-to-date information about the next stimulus bill and remain in contact with their members of Congress throughout this crisis to convey the urgent need for funding.

States expanding vote-at-home options to keep elections safe

It is becoming increasingly clear that in-person voting threatens the

health and safety of both voters and poll workers throughout the country, as the public health crisis around the coronavirus continues to grow. To counter these problems, many states are working to expand vote by mail, also known as vote-at-home (VAH). The VAH options are being deployed for both the remaining state primaries and the general election in November. These options include a range of changes, such as moving from requiring an excuse for an absentee ballot

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to no excuse required or transitioning from no-excuse absentee voting to an entirely vote-at-home system.

Some states already have full VAH systems or mostly VAH and therefore are uniquely suited to address this crisis with only minor adjustments needed to their current structure. These states are Colorado, Oregon, Washington, Utah (which reached 100 percent VAH last year) and Hawaii (which will reach 100 percent VAH this year). Arizona, California, and Montana already have a large majority of voters who vote by mail and are prepared to expand to a VAH system for all voters. Nevada, New Jersey, Virginia and the District of Columbia all offer no-excuse permanent mail-in ballot options as well.

That leaves 39 states with varying

levels of absentee voting that will need to find a way to respond to the current crisis, whether that be for an upcoming primary or for the November general election. States that have not already held their primaries are changing voting dates and making adjustments where applicable.

As of the date this issue of the magazine went to press, the adjusted schedule for primary elections for May and beyond is as follows:

May 2: Kansas cancelled in-person voting for the May 2 Democratic presidential primary, which will now be held entirely by mail.

May 22: Hawaii cancelled in-person voting for the April 4 presidential primary and extended the deadline for mail-in ballots until May 22.

June 2: Connecticut, Delaware and Rhode Island moved their April 28 presidential primaries to June 2. Indiana, Maryland and Pennsylvania moved both their state primaries and presidential primaries from May 5 for Indiana and April 28 for the other two to June 2.

- Connecticut, Delaware and Indiana all require an excuse for an absentee ballot application to be accepted.
- Rhode Island, Maryland and Pennsylvania all have no excuse required absentee voting, but voters must make sure to apply.

June 9: West Virginia and Georgia moved their presidential and state primaries from May 12 and May 19 respectively to June 9. West Virginia requires an excuse for an absentee ballot application to be accepted. Georgia has no-excuse-required ab-

sentee voting, but voters must make sure to apply.

June 20: Louisiana moved its April 4 presidential primary to June 20. Louisiana requires an excuse for an absentee ballot application to be accepted.

June 23: Mississippi and North Carolina moved their state runoff elections from March 31 and May 12, respectively, to June 23. Kentucky and New York moved their presidential and state Primaries from May 19 and April 23 respectively, to June 23. Virginia moved its June 9 state primary to June 23.

- Mississippi and Kentucky both require an excuse for an absentee ballot application to be accepted.
- North Carolina has no-excuse-required absentee voting, but voters must make sure to apply, while New York is transitioning to no-excuse-required absentee voting.
- Virginia has no-excuse-required permanent absentee voting, but voters must make sure to apply.

July 7: New Jersey moved its June 2 presidential and state primary to July 7. New Jersey has no-excuse-required permanent absentee voting, but voters must make sure to apply.

July 14: Alabama and Texas moved their state runoff elections from March 31 and May 26, respectively, to July 14. Both states require an excuse for absentee ballot application to be accepted.

Aug. 11: Georgia moved its July 21 state runoff election to August 11. Georgia has no-excuse-required ab-

sentee voting, but voters must make sure to apply.

As these changes make clear, the pandemic has dramatically disrupted the 2020 election process. In some cases, it has created chaos. Notably, Wisconsin's primary was held on April 7 despite attempts to change the date in response to the threat to public health. In the week before the vote, Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers called for a special session of the state legislature, requesting that lawmakers postpone the primary. The Republican-controlled legislature refused to postpone it, prompting Evers to issue an executive order to postpone in-person voting and extend the receipt deadline for mail-in ballots to June 9.

Later that same day, the Wisconsin Supreme Court blocked the governor's executive order in a 4-to-2 decision by the court's conservative majority, offering no explanation for the ruling. Also on that day, the U.S. Supreme Court, in a 5-4 decision, again by the court's conservative majority, blocked a lower court's six-day extension of Wisconsin's receipt deadline for mailed-in ballots. In response to the decision, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg wrote that "the court's order, I fear, will result in massive disenfranchisement."

This sequence of events meant that if the majority of Wisconsin voters wanted their ballots to be counted, they were forced by the Wisconsin legislature, the Wisconsin Supreme Court, and the U.S. Supreme Court to go in-person to cast their votes, risking their health and that of others. These judicial decisions may have far-broader implications for states that have not yet postponed their primaries. Many states that have

been heavily reliant on in-person voting will be guided by the fiasco in Wisconsin.

NALC encourages all states to adopt policies that keep our elections and citizens safe and secure during this

time of uncertainty and crisis. To find the most accurate and up to date information—specific to your state’s elections—you can visit the webpage of your state’s secretary of state. If your state does not have a secretary

of state, search for the office of elections (example: Hawaii). You also can visit the National Conference of State Legislatures webpage on state primary dates, which is tracking all the schedule changes. **PR**

NALC launches “You Are the Current Resident” podcast with COVID-19 pandemic information

NALC has been at the forefront of unions using communications technology to deliver informative and up-to-date messaging straight to letter carriers, most recently through social media and push notifications on the NALC Member App. But now it’s bringing the message straight to letter carriers’ ears.

NALC has launched the weekly podcast, “You Are the Current Resident” on Podbean and other popular podcasting venues, including iTunes, Spotify and Google Play.

During each episode, NALC Executive Vice President Brian Renfroe and Assistant to the President for Contract Administration Mark Sims discuss vital topics affecting the letter carrier craft and the union. The COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on letter carriers and the Postal Service have dominated early episodes since the podcast debuted in March (for more about the podcast, see Renfroe’s column on page 30). The show’s format also includes interviews with other NALC leaders to talk in depth about issues affecting letter carriers and the union.

In just the first two weeks since the launch of its first episode, listeners have played the podcast more than 15,000 times, and the reviews have been overwhelmingly positive.



Podcast hosts NALC Executive Vice President Brian Renfroe (l) and Assistant to the President for Contract Administration Mark Sims (r) discuss a union administration topic with Secretary-Treasurer Nicole Rhine.

and can click “Follow” to receive updates when new episodes are released.

Accessing the podcast is easiest on Podbean:

- On smartphones, simply go to the Apple App Store or Google Play Store and download the Podbean Podcast App & Player. Once you have downloaded the app, open it and create an account (or sign on as a guest) and go to the search icon at top and enter “You Are the Current Resident.” From there, you can listen to the available episodes

- On your computer or mobile browser, go to youarethecurrentresident.podbean.com and click on the play button of the episode you wish to listen to.

For additional audio content, select articles and columns from each issue of *The Postal Record* are recorded and will be uploaded on a monthly basis. The audiobook version of *The Postal Record* also is available to listen to on Podbean. **PR**