



News from Washington

Postal issues take center stage in Congress, administration and public

Since June, the nation's capital has been busy with postal issues. And while a lot has happened, not much has been accomplished.

While members of Congress were in Washington briefly in July and August, most of their time was spent arguing over whether additional COVID-19-related relief would be approved before the August recess. The House passed its relief package, the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions, or HEROES, Act (H.R. 6800), four months ago. The bill contains the postal relief that NALC has been lobbying aggressively for, including:

- Receiving \$25 billion in direct appropriations to help USPS weather the financial crisis brought on by the pandemic-related economic shutdown.
- Removing restrictions placed in the previous COVID-19 relief bill, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, on the \$10 billion in added USPS borrowing authority from the U.S. Treasury.
- Creating 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.

At the end of July, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) unveiled the Senate's GOP counterproposal, a \$1 trillion relief package called the Health, Economic Assistance, Liability Protection and Schools (HEALS) Act. Unfortunately, that measure did not include any mention of the Postal Service, and some GOP

senators immediately slammed the proposal for other reasons, such as taking on additional spending, payroll tax cuts and liability protections for employers. McConnell immediately retreated from addressing any Senate measure, deferring his leadership to the White House to negotiate directly with House and Senate Democratic leaders.

Despite the lack of Senate GOP leadership, negotiations between the White House and Democratic leaders progressed for a brief period. Democrats pushed relentlessly for their \$3.4 trillion to \$3.7 trillion measure, while the White House sought to keep the confines of any deal limited to \$1 trillion. A deal looked within reach, especially on the issue of Postal Service relief, but it all fell apart. The broken pieces have left Congress and the public singularly focused on the Postal Service's ability to serve the public, especially on Election Day.

The focus on the Postal Service comes on the heels of significant and high-profile USPS happenings, including the appointment of a new postmaster general. Louis DeJoy took the reins on June 15 and immediately zeroed in on congressional inaction.

"As we have repeatedly stated, Congress and the Postal Regulatory Commission have long delayed much-needed legislative and regulatory reforms to help address the situation," DeJoy said. "Congress must enact reform legislation that addresses our unaffordable retirement payments. Most importantly, Congress must allow the Postal Service to integrate our retiree health benefits program with Medicare, which is a common-sense best practice followed by all businesses who still offer retiree health care. Rather than sensational-

izing isolated operational incidents that I acknowledge can occur, and have always occurred in a business of our size and scope, or attempting to impose unfunded mandates unrelated to any postal policies, I ask members of Congress to take action on this one legislative burdensome issue that will actually make a difference."

That statement, given during his first meeting with the Board of Governors on Aug. 7, came amidst implementation of various USPS management initiatives that are resulting in delayed mail and undelivered routes in many areas of the country, realignment of the USPS management structure, and a recent letter from the Postal Service to 46 states, essentially implying that those states will need to pay First Class rates to ensure two- or three-day service on ballots.

The result of these actions has been nothing short of public and congressional outrage, including protests and press conferences outside post offices, as well as demonstrations in front of the postmaster general's home. In addition, Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee (HSGAC) Ranking Member Gary Peters (D-MI) launched an investigation into nationwide service issues, including mail delays, non-delivered routes and some elimination of overtime. House Oversight and Government Reform (COR) Chairwoman Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) also called both the postmaster general and Robert Duncan, the chairman of the postal Board of Governors, to testify before the committee.

On Aug. 18, in response to mounting pressure from the House to negotiate over additional COVID-19 relief, McConnell announced the Delivering

Correction: In the July issue, we mistakenly implied that the Department of Labor's new rule to allow retirement plan administrators to use electronic delivery for required documents rather than paper would affect CSRS, FERS or the TSP. It does not.

Interest arbitration update

NALC is prepared to begin the interest arbitration hearings for a new National Agreement. As the union has prepared for the proceedings, it also has continued the negotiations with the Postal Service in an effort to reach a tentative settlement. In just a few short weeks, NALC either will have a tentative agreement, or the union will begin the hearings, which are scheduled to start on Sept. 23.

Immediate Relief to America's Families, Schools and Small Businesses Act—a draft “skinny” proposal of the Senate's previously announced July 27 proposal, the HEROES Act.

The \$500 billion measure includes employer liability protections, small business support, limited extension of unemployment insurance, vaccine development and limited money for schools. Of note, the bill would convert the \$10 billion line of credit for the Postal Service approved by the CARES Act earlier this year into a grant to be accessed once Postal Service cash on hand dips below \$8 billion.

The inclusion follows significant mail delays reported nationwide and mounting pressure on senators to address postal relief, and three months after House passage of the HEROES Act.

Aside from the inadequate response to postal relief, the skinny Senate measure does nothing to help 28 million Americans on unemployment and provides no money for testing, hospitals, rental assistance, eviction moratoriums, state and local governments whose budgets are exhausted, state nutrition assistance programs or underfunded schools, to name a few.

The announcement of the skinny proposal has done nothing to bring House, Senate and the administration back to the negotiating table to discuss a broader relief package.

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) called members back to Washington during the August recess to vote on legislation that would prevent the Postal Service from making service changes during a pandemic.

The legislation originated from recently introduced legislation by Rank-

ing Member Peters and Chairwoman Maloney, known as the Delivering for America Act (S. 4527 and H.R. 8015, respectively), nearly identical bills that would prevent the Postal Service from making changes to service standards during a pandemic.

On a rare Saturday session during August recess, the House passed H.R. 8015, the Delivering for America Act, by a vote of 257-150. Joining Democrats in voting for the bill were 26 Republicans: Reps. Don Bacon (NE), Troy Balderson (OH), Mike Bost (IL), Vern Buchanan (FL), Rodney Davis (IL), Brian Fitzpatrick (PA), Jeff Fortenberry (NE), Sam Graves (MO), Jaime Herrera Beutler (WA), Will Hurd (TX), Dave Joyce (OH), John Katko (NY), Peter King (NY), Doug LaMalfa (CA), David McCaul (TX), David McKinley (WV), Tom Reed (NY), Chris Smith (NJ), Pete Stauber (MN), Elise Stefanik (NY), Steve Stivers (OH), Mike Turner (OH), Fred Upton (MI), Jeff Van Drew (NJ), Ann Wagner (MO) and Don Young (AK).

“NALC deeply appreciates members of Congress setting aside partisan politics by voting to ensure that the Postal Service has the resources necessary to meet the needs of the public through the election and pandemic,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said. “We hope the White House and Senate will follow the lead of the House of Representatives and work to provide the same relief.”

Passage of the House bill follows the breakdown in negotiations among the White House, House and Senate on a larger COVID-19 relief bill. The House passed the HEROES Act four months ago, and the Senate has subsequently announced two limited measures, neither of which has been

discussed in the Senate. The Senate does not intend to return to Washington until after Labor Day, when it will have only a few weeks to reach a deal on a COVID-19 measure and fund the government beyond Sept. 30.

Even with no agreement among the House, Senate and White House, congressional interest in the Postal Service is not waning. With reported nationwide service delays, both the HSGAC and COR committees convened back-to-back hearings calling in new Postmaster General DeJoy to testify. In the House, PMG DeJoy testified alongside Robert M. Duncan, chairman of the USPS Board of Governors. Both committees questioned the new PMG on a wide range of issues, including his background and his communications with the Trump administration, USPS capacity for processing ballots in the upcoming election, the need for COVID-19 relief, postal reform preferences, mail service delays, removal of sortation equipment and collection boxes, limitations on overtime, and other issues of concern. DeJoy largely defended his actions, but made abundantly clear that the Postal Service will process every ballot in its possession in a timely manner.

With the November election just around the corner, interest in the Postal Service from Congress and the public remains high. We expect a very busy September with postal issues at the forefront. NALC members are encouraged to contact their senators to urge them to take action to provide the Postal Service with relief, favorable loan terms and conditions, and hazard pay.

For the latest information, please visit the “Government Affairs” section of the NALC website. **PR**