



News from Washington

As new Congress takes over, letter carrier issues take priority



In the first two months since convening the 117th Congress, the body has formalized its leadership, rules and committee structure. For the first time in 11 years, Democrats control the House, Senate and White House, which means there has been a shift in initiatives driven by the new White House administration's priorities, including strengthening the Postal Service.

While Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) will set each chamber's schedules and priorities, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) will still wield influence in negotiations.

In the Senate, the chamber is split evenly with 50 Democrats and 50 Republicans. Vice President Kamala Harris will have the tie-breaking vote on matters where the chamber is evenly split. In the House, there are 221 Democrats and 211 Republicans, with three vacancies. Rep. Cedric Richmond (D-LA) joined the Biden administration as senior advisor to the president and director of the White House Office of Public Engagement. Rep. Ron Wright (R-TX) and Rep.-elect Luke Letlow (R-LA) both died after being elected, which means there will be a special election for all three seats—none of which is expected to be a competitive race.

These narrow margins mean that letter carriers must work harder to find consensus and allies, since NALC issues typically aren't partisan issues. It is incumbent upon letter carriers to continue to actively seek out and educate every member of Congress, no matter their views on non-letter carrier policies and issues.

"The 2020 elections have narrowed the margins of control in both chambers, which means that bipartisanship and compromise will be critical to accomplishing our goals this Congress," NALC President Fredric Rolando said.

The 117th Congress is also more diverse, with 121 women, at least 105 minorities, 11 LGBTQ members, 91 veterans and 16 union members. In addition, 69 new faces have joined Congress. In the House, there are 15 new Democrats and 45 new Republicans, including some former members of Congress: David Valadeo (R-CA), Darrell Issa (R-CA), Claudia Tenney (R-NY) and Pete Sessions (R-TX).

In the Senate, there will be five new Democrats and four new Republicans to get to know, including Sens. Tommy Tuberville (R-AL), John Hickenlooper (D-CO), Bill Hagerty (R-TN), Alex Padilla (D-CA), Jon Ossoff (D-GA) and Raphael Warnock (D-GA). Three of the freshmen are former House members: Sens. Roger Marshall (R-KS), Ben Ray Lujan (N-NM) and Cynthia Lummis (R-WY).

While prioritizing the new faces will help NALC members get off on the right foot in educating members, equally important will be ensuring that members of Congress on key committees are informed on letter carrier priorities, such as repealing the mandate to pre-fund retiree health benefits; postal reform; COVID-19 relief for the Postal Service; pandemic-related hazard pay; emergency paid sick leave; adequate personal protections from COVID-19 virus transmission; prioritization of vaccination for letter carriers on the front lines of this pandemic; preserving six-day delivery, door delivery and service standards; and preventing postal privatization.

Below are members of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform (COR) and the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee (HSGAC), which have primary jurisdiction over federal employees and the Postal Service. It is imperative for these members to get up to speed on issues of importance to letter carriers.

House Oversight and Government Reform Committee (COR)

Democrats

Carolyn B. Maloney (NY), *Chairwoman*
Eleanor Holmes Norton (DC)
Stephen F. Lynch (MA)
Jim Cooper (TN)
Gerald E. Connolly (VA)
Raja Krishnamoorthi (IL)
Jamie Raskin (MD)
Ro Khanna (CA)
Kweisi Mfume (MD)
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (NY)
Rashida Tlaib (MI)
Katie Porter (CA)
Cori Bush (MO)
Danny K. Davis (IL)
Debbie Wasserman Schultz (FL)
Peter Welch (VT)
Henry C. “Hank” Johnson Jr. (GA)
John P. Sarbanes (MD)
Jackie Speier (CA)
Robin L. Kelly (IL)
Brenda L. Lawrence (MI)
Mark DeSaulnier (CA)
Jimmy Gomez (CA)
Ayanna Pressley (MA)

Republicans

James Comer (KY), *Ranking Member*
Jim Jordan (OH)
Paul A. Gosar (AZ)
Virginia Foxx (NC)
Jody B. Hice (GA)
Glenn Grothman (WI)
Michael Cloud (TX)
Bob Gibbs (OH)

Clay Higgins (LA)
Ralph Norman (SC)
Fred Keller (PA)
Pete Sessions (TX)
Andy Biggs (AZ)
Byron Donalds (FL)
Nancy Mace (SC)
Yvette Herrell (NM)
Jake LaTurner (KS)
Pat Fallon (TX)
Andrew Clyde (GA)
Scott Franklin (FL)

Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs (HSGAC)

Democrats

Gary Peters (MI), *Chairman*
Tom Carper (DE)
Margaret Hassan (NH)
Kyrsten Sinema (AZ)
Jacky Rosen (NV)
Jon Ossoff (GA)
Alex Padilla (CA)

Republicans

Rob Portman (OH), *Ranking Member*
Ron Johnson (WI)
Rand Paul (KY)
James Lankford (OK)
Mitt Romney (UT)
Rick Scott (FL)
Josh Hawley (MO)

For the first time in many years, NALC will be well positioned for success to move the Postal Service and its employees forward instead of playing defense.

“As the 117th Congress tackles its work, we will continue to engage every member of Congress,” Rolando said.

Priority bills and resolutions

Congress has wasted no time in introducing NALC priority legislation. Below are important pieces of legislation that NALC members can

immediately contact their members of Congress about to co-sponsor. These bills are crucial markers that help steer the conversation as Congress tackles postal reform efforts. Strong support sends a message to lawmakers and the White House of what is most significant.

USPS Fairness Act reintroduced in House and Senate

The USPS Fairness Act was reintroduced in the House (H.R. 695) and Senate (S. 145). Both bills would repeal the mandate that the Postal Service pre-fund decades’ worth of health benefits for its future retirees, enacted through the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act (PAEA) of 2006.

In the House, the bill was reintroduced by House Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman Peter DeFazio (D-OR), Rep. Tom Reed (R-NY), House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairwoman Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), Reps. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) and Collin Allred (D-TX), along with 219 bipartisan original co-sponsors. Exceeding 218 co-sponsors demonstrates that a majority of the House supports the measure, making it more likely to be considered on the House floor. As letter carriers recall, the USPS Fairness Act passed last Congress by a vote of 309-106.

“The unreasonable pre-funding mandate has threatened the survival of the USPS and placed at risk vital services for the millions who rely on it,” DeFazio said. “I’m hopeful that, under a Biden Administration, we can finally repeal this ludicrous policy, provide the USPS with critical financial relief, and take the first step towards much-needed comprehensive reform.”

“We care about solving the Postal Service’s financial burdens to ensure millions of Americans, particularly those in more rural areas, do not lose access to critical postal services,” Reed said. “The pre-funding mandate is unfair, uneconomic and inhibits the USPS from focusing on the services the American people rely on, including life-saving medication deliveries or high priority mail. Congress must act to restore the financial integrity of USPS.”

“As the chair of the Committee on Oversight and Reform, I vowed to work with my colleagues in a bipartisan fashion to address the Postal Service’s long-standing financial problems. I’m very proud of the legislation that we introduced today to accomplish this shared goal,” Maloney said. “I am laser-focused on fixing the Postal Service’s financial problems, which have been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. I hope this bill swiftly passes Congress and becomes law.”

“This unfair law has put the Postal Service in a horrible financial position, preventing USPS from investing in services beneficial to our community,” Fitzpatrick said. “I’m proud to join my colleagues in introducing this bipartisan legislation that will end this mandate and solve the most pressing financial problem facing our letter carriers and post offices across the country.”

“Since 2007, the onerous pre-funding mandate has hampered the Postal Service’s ability to invest in infrastructure and services,” Allred said. “I’m proud to join my colleagues from both sides of the aisle and both chambers in introducing this legislation to get rid of the mandate and allow the Postal

Service to function unobstructed like every other federal agency.”

In the Senate, the bill was reintroduced by Sens. Steve Daines (R-MT) and Brian Schatz (D-HI).

“The United States Postal Service is essential to Montanans across our state, especially for our seniors, veterans and rural communities,” Daines said. “My bipartisan bill will ensure that the Postal Service stays in business providing world class delivery of our mail every day while also ensuring its employees maintain their benefits.”

“There is no reason we should be requiring the USPS to pre-fund its future [retiree] health benefits. It’s an unnecessary burden that is jeopardizing its financial health,” Schatz said. “This is an easy fix that will dramatically improve USPS’s finances and ensure mail delivery can continue uninterrupted.”

The pre-funding mandate has cost an average of \$5.2 billion annually since 2007 and is responsible for 84 percent of USPS losses over the last 14 years. In the last Congress, just as momentum was building following the House vote, the COVID-19 pandemic took precedence over other priorities and Senate leadership refused to act on the bill. Fortunately, with new Senate leadership and a strong desire to address this mandate, coupled with support for repeal from the new administration and the Postal Service, the landscape is favorable for finally repealing the mandate.

“We appreciate the leadership of the members in the House and Senate to bring the USPS Fairness Act back to the forefront of its legislative agenda,” President Rolando said. “Eliminating this mandate is critical to our success on postal reform efforts. NALC remains committed to working with Congress

on all options that can bring financial stability to this agency so that we can continue to serve the public.”

Six-day mail delivery House resolution

Reps. Sam Graves (R-MO) and Gerry Connolly (D-VA) have reintroduced their resolution to preserve six-day mail delivery with House Resolution 114 (H. Res. 114).

The resolution is identical to previous versions that have been introduced at the beginning of every Congress since 2009 calling on Congress to “take all appropriate measures to ensure the continuation of its 6-day mail delivery service.”

The resolution has continued to achieve a bipartisan majority of support in the House, demonstrating the overwhelming support for maintaining six-day delivery. Over the years, lawmakers have pushed back against attempts to reduce six-day delivery, citing the importance of the network delivering seven days a week. In fact, each year, congressional appropriators include language protecting six-day mail delivery in its annual appropriations bills, signaling the tremendous support for maintaining the service.

Door delivery House resolution

House Resolution 109 (H. Res. 109), which calls on Congress to “take all appropriate measures to ensure the continuation of door delivery for all businesses and residential customers,” has been reintroduced in the 117th Congress.

The bipartisan resolution is identical to previous versions of the resolution and is led by Reps. Stephanie Murphy (D-FL) and David Joyce (R-OH), who took over leadership of the resolution

following the retirement of Reps. Susan Davis (D-CA) and Peter King (R-NY) last Congress.

“In communities around the country, door delivery has become a staple of American life. During this pandemic, many families have come to rely on the U.S. Postal Service for grocery and medication delivery, and voting information,” Murphy said. “We should be making it easier for Americans—especially seniors and the disabled—to receive these critical items directly, rather than creating barriers that will prevent them from accessing them.”

“The U.S. Postal Service has an important role to play during this pandemic, with many Americans and small businesses relying on its services to receive essential goods, get critical medications, pay bills, and serve customers,” Joyce said. “With the pandemic already impacting timely mail delivery across the country, we must preserve door delivery for the individuals and businesses who expect and rely on it.”

In each Congress, the measure has consistently received overwhelming bipartisan support, demonstrating the importance of retaining door service for communities who currently have it.

Anti-postal privatization House resolution

Reps. Stephen Lynch (D-MA) and Rodney Davis (R-IL) reintroduced their resolution calling on the House to take “all appropriate measures to ensure that the United States Postal Service remains an independent establishment of the Federal Government and is not subject to privatization.”

The resolution, H. Res. 47, is identical to those introduced over the last two Congresses, both of which exceeded a bipartisan majority of support.

USPS election performance praised

Looking back at a challenging election year, the Postal Service reported that it had performed well in delivering 2020 election mail and ballots to voters and delivering completed ballots to election officials.

Despite the pandemic, a record 159 million voters cast ballots in last year’s general election in November—22 million more than in 2016, the last presidential election. In every state, a greater share of eligible voters turned out to vote than in 2016. Voting by mail helped make this turnout possible.

In its post-election analysis, “Delivering the Nation’s Election Mail in an Extraordinary Year,” USPS reported that it had delivered 136 million ballots in 2020, a figure that includes both blank ballots sent to voters and completed ballots sent to election officials—the highest volume of mailed ballots in history.

“Throughout the 2020 election, the Postal Service faced unprecedented challenges, but the commitment of our 644,000 men and women to deliver the nation’s ballots never wavered even in the face of the pandemic,” Postmaster General Louis DeJoy said about postal employees.

The average time to deliver blank ballots to voters was 2.1 days, and the average completed ballot sent by voters reached election officials in 1.6 days.

Before the election, the Postal Service had recommended that voters mail their ballots at least seven days before their state’s deadline for receipt of ballots. The report found that 99.89 percent of ballots reached election officials within that one-week window. Most arrived sooner: 97.9 percent of ballots mailed from voters to election officials were delivered within three days, and 99.7 percent were delivered within five days.

Add political mail—mail pieces sent to voters from candidates and others to influence their vote or seek dona-

tions—and the total volume of election mail surpassed 4.6 billion pieces for the election year. That number exceeded the 2016 election cycle figure by 114 percent.

For letter carriers in Georgia, the election work didn’t end on Election Day. Both of November’s U.S. Senate races in that state went to runoff elections in January, so a new round of election mail and ballots flooded the mail stream there.

An additional 1.1 million ballots were delivered by mail in Georgia in November and December for the runoff, a contest that was critical in determining which party would have the majority in the Senate. When Georgia voters mailed their completed runoff ballots to election officials, 99.42 percent of the ballots arrived in seven days or less. On average, the Postal Service delivered ballots from Georgia election officials to voters in 3.4 days and ballots from voters to the state’s election officials in 1.9 days.

“These successes in both the general election and the Georgia runoffs demonstrate that the Postal Service created a robust, proven process for expeditiously handling the nation’s election mail and was flexible enough to respond to unique challenges by bolstering and altering those processes in the face of dramatically changed circumstances,” the USPS report said. “More than that, the Postal Service’s performance in the 2020 election season is a testament to the hardworking and mission-driven women and men of the Postal Service.”

NALC President Fredric Rolando noted the role of letter carriers in all this.

“Faced with the pressures of the pandemic at work and at home, letter carriers were called on to make democracy work—and they met the challenge,” Rolando said. “They made 2020 another proud year in our union’s history.” PR

As letter carriers may recall, the resolution's introduction was in direct response to the former administration's government reorganization and restructure plan, "Delivery Government Solutions in the 21st Century," through the Office of Management and Budget. The report, which was deemed dead on arrival on Capitol Hill, took aim at numerous federal agencies, including calls to privatize the Postal Service. The report was followed up by a White House Postal Task Force report, which highlighted internationally privatized postal systems.

President Biden has signaled that postal privatization will have no place in the new administration. In response to his views on privatization of the Postal Service, then-candidate Biden said: "USPS workers are the eyes and ears of the community and are often on the first line of defense for rural and disenfranchised communities. Postal service provided to everyone and every house, regardless of geography, income, race, religion, or sexual orientation and we must honor and defend the USPS's Universal Service Obligation as a core belief of our great nation. As a valuable public service that does not use taxpayer dollars for operating expenses, USPS will be defended from all attempts at privatization when I am president."

Service standards House resolution

Reps. David McKinley (R-WV) and Marcy Kaptur (D-OH) have reintroduced House Resolution 119 (H. Res. 119), expressing the sense of the House that the Postal Service should take all appropriate measures to restore the service standards that were in effect as of July 1, 2012.

Over the last several years, the Postal Service has proposed and implemented service standard reductions resulting in the elimination of overnight mail delivery, delayed mail processing due to the closure and consolidation of hundreds of processing plants, and reduced hours at thousands of post offices.

Social Security Fairness Act reintroduced

Reps. Rodney Davis (R-IL) and Abigail Spanberger (D-VA) have reintroduced the Social Security Fairness Act of 2021 (H.R. 82), which would repeal the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) titles of the Social Security Act.

Under current law, inclusion of the WEP and GPO in Social Security law have resulted in a benefits formula that significantly disadvantages some categories of federal employees who have a government pension, resulting in decreased or eliminated Social Security benefits.

WEP affects Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) employees by reducing earned Social Security benefits. WEP also reduces the Social Security benefits of Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) employees who also receive a public pension from some other job not covered by Social Security. In addition, WEP affects employees who move from a job in which they earn Social Security to a job where they do not earn the Social Security benefit.

GPO affects CSRS employees and spousal benefits of people who work as federal, state or local government employees if the job is not covered by Social Security. GPO currently reduces

by two-thirds the benefit received by surviving spouses who also collect a government pension. H.R. 82 would eliminate both WEP and GPO from the Social Security Act.

Despite consistent bipartisan support, unfortunately, efforts to see this legislation pass into law have been unsuccessful due to the price tag. Nonetheless, NALC will continue to support this important legislation.

Presidential nominations update

President Biden's first order of business was naming Cabinet nominations, which require Senate confirmation. As this publication was going to print, six of the 23 had been confirmed. They are: Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, Defense Secretary Gen. Lloyd Austin, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellin, Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough.

Confirmations for attorney general and secretaries for the Departments of Labor (DOL), Commerce, Health and Human Services, Energy, Education, Interior, Agriculture, and Housing and Urban Development were pending in the Senate as this publication was going to print. In addition, a handful of nominations of Cabinet-level status also are pending, including director of the Office of Management and Budget, director of the Office of Personnel Management, United States trade representative, Environmental Protection Agency administrator, small business administrator, national intelligence director, United Nations ambassador, chairperson of the Council on Economic Advisors and presidential science advisor.

While the Postal Service intersects with nearly every industrial sector and agency, NALC is closely monitoring nominations for the DOL.

President Biden selected Marty Walsh to serve as DOL secretary. He would be the first union member to hold the position in many years. Walsh is a second-generation member of the Laborers' Local Union 223 and a former mayor of Boston.

In his testimony before the Senate, Walsh recalled the union being his family's "way into the middle class. It meant a fair wage, so we could have

a home, and give back to our community. It meant safety on the job, so we didn't have to live in fear of an accident derailing our lives. It meant a pension, so my parents could retire with dignity. And it meant health insurance."

Walsh highlighted his personal struggles, including battling cancer as a child and alcoholism as an adult, crediting his union benefits with overcoming each, and eventually earning his college degree at age 42 from Boston College. In his testimony, he pointed to these struggles as his motivation

for "protecting all workers with fair pay, healthcare and unemployment benefits, safety in the workplace, and a secure retirement, ensuring equal access to good jobs—and the right to join a union and engage in collective bargaining—continuing education and job training, access to mental health and substance use treatment."

NALC will monitor and report to members as Congress continues to take up letter carrier issues. For more information, download the NALC Member App for your smartphone or go to nalc.org/government-affairs. **PR**

The Postal Record wins two ILCA awards

The monthly journal of the National Association of Letter Carriers, *The Postal Record*, collected two writing awards in the International Labor Communications Association's annual Labor Media Awards Contest.

The awards were announced by ILCA on Dec. 17. Its contest recognizes excellence among member publications, websites, film, video and other media. It is the first and largest competition exclusively for labor journalists. Normally, the awards are presented at ILCA's convention, but the convention was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

NALC's top honor was a second place in the Best Labor History Story category. The story, which ran in the March 2019 magazine, was titled "NALC member recalls the Great Postal Strike from the other side," and was about **Jeffrey Chester**, now a member of Sacramento, CA Branch 133. Chester was an Air Force security airman in 1970, when he was part of the military forces called up by President Richard Nixon in an attempt to restore mail

service during the 1970 Great Postal Strike. The article, written by Writer/Editor Rick Hodges, recounted that episode and followed the airman's career, as he later became a letter carrier and an NALC member.

"Keeping the past present" received honorable mention in the Best Profile category. The December 2019 story, written by Writer/Editor Jenessa Wagner, looked at what started as a school project that **James "Jack" Hadley** helped his son create. The project expanded, and eventually the retired Branch 1026 letter carrier created a Black history museum in Thomasville, GA.

In announcing its winners, ILCA wrote, "The winners represent the best work in labor communications and promote the highest standards of labor journalism."

Dozens of international unions and



individual locals enter the ILCA contest annually, including some of the nation's largest unions. NALC resumed its membership in ILCA in 2019 after more than a decade's absence. In both annual contests since, its magazine has won multiple awards.

"*The Postal Record* is among the very best labor magazines in the country, and we're proud that ILCA has recognized that again," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "Congratulations to Rick and Jenessa." **PR**