



News from Washington

Congress funds government through Dec. 16



Congress has passed a continuing resolution that will fund the government through Dec. 16. On Sept. 29, the Senate voted 72-25 and the following day the House of Representatives voted 230-201 on the Continuing Appropriations and Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act (H.R. 6833). These votes sent the bill to President Joe Biden's desk, and he signed it into law on Sept. 30, narrowly beating the midnight deadline for a government shutdown.

Because Congress has failed to pass the series of annual spending bills for Fiscal Year 2023, this short-term fix is needed to keep the government running.

In addition to funding the government through Dec. 16, the bill includes \$12 billion in aid to Ukraine, \$2 billion for domestic disaster relief, and \$1 billion for home heating assistance. The bill also permits the Federal Emergency Management Agency to access \$35 billion for Hurricane Ian relief aid. Additionally, it extends the Food and Drug Administration user fees for five years, avoiding upcoming layoffs.

This was the last vote that the House plans to conduct until after the midterm elections this month. While the Senate could return for votes before the midterm elections, it is unlikely.

NALC voter guide available

As the 117th Congress moves toward a close, NALC encourages all members to have a plan in place to vote in the midterm elections on Tuesday, Nov. 8.

NALC's online voter guide is available to help you keep up with important deadlines in your state regarding voter registration, mail-in voting and early voting. It also includes Labor 2022 volunteer opportunities and information on how members of

Congress voted on the Postal Service Reform Act and how they acted on other priority legislation. Visit nalc.org/voterguide.

House committee advances Social Security Fairness Act; contact your representative to bring it to the House floor

On Sept. 20, in a voice vote, the House Committee on Ways and Means approved the Social Security Fairness Act of 2021 (H.R. 82). The bill would repeal the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) titles of the Social Security Act, which unfairly reduce or sometimes eliminate Social Security benefits for millions of federal annuitants, including former Civil Service Retirement System letter carriers. H.R. 82, introduced by Reps. Rodney Davis (R-IL) and Abigail Spanberger (D-VA), has a strong bipartisan consensus with more than 300 co-sponsors.

"The millions of public-service workers across the country who are being unfairly punished by the Social Security Act deserve [a vote on this bill]," Rep. Davis said. "That's why a bipartisan supermajority of the House is co-sponsoring our bill. Let's get this done."

"The 117th Congress can finally be the one that fixes this long-standing inequity and protects the benefits of retirees who dedicated their careers to public service," Rep. Spanberger said.

On Sept. 19, NALC, along with other postal unions, sent a letter to the House Committee on Ways and Means urging the passage of H.R. 82 without amendment, stating: "After 30 years of inaction in Congress, it is time to repeal these unfair penalties that reduce retirees' incomes by thousands

of dollars every year, taking away the benefits that they earned in private sector employment.” Visit the Government Affairs section of nalc.org to read the full letter. Despite broad bipartisan support, with the House not planning to conduct any votes until after the midterm elections, the path of the legislation remains uncertain.

House passes five bills supporting veterans

On Sept. 14, the House voted 397-29 to suspend the rules to pass several bills, including five bills that support veterans:

- **Student Veteran Emergency Relief Act of 2022 (H.R. 7939)**

This bill, introduced by Reps. Mike Levin (D-CA) and Nancy Mace (R-SC), would codify many COVID-19-related education provisions to ensure that veterans who are students are not negatively affected by any necessary periods of remote learning. It would also expand the veteran readiness and employment program, providing more veterans access to self-employment training. Additionally, it would allow the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to extend GI Bill flexibilities during any future emergency declared by the president.

- **Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2022 (H.R. 7846)**

H.R. 7846 would require the VA to increase compensation rates for disabled veterans and dependency and indemnity compensation rates for surviving spouses and children. The rates would be increased at the same percentage as the cost-of-living increase in benefits for Social

Security recipients that is effective on Dec. 1, 2022. The bill was introduced by Reps. Elaine Luria (D-VA) and Troy Nehls (R-TX).

- **Improving Access to the VA Home Loan Benefit Act of 2022 (H.R. 7735)**

This bill, introduced by Rep. Mike Bost (R-IL), would require the VA to update regulations, requirements and guidance related to appraisals for housing loans guaranteed by the VA. It would specify when an appraisal is required, how an appraisal is to be conducted, and who is eligible to conduct an appraisal for VA loans to help streamline the home-buying process for veterans.

- **Wounded Warriors Access Act (H.R. 5916)**

Reps. Pete Aguilar (D-CA) and Chip Roy (R-TX) introduced this bill that would allow veterans to access their C-Files—which include service records, VA exam results and more—through an online portal, and receive a digital copy of their files. The VA would be required to fulfill all requests within 120 days, streamlining the process and allowing veterans to receive their benefits faster.

- **Faster Payments to Veterans' Survivors Act of 2022 (H.R. 8260)**

H.R. 8260 would shorten the time that the VA is authorized to designate, contact and pay primary or alternate insurance beneficiaries from two years to one year, and from four years to two years, respectively. It would ensure that procedures for paying alternate beneficiaries are consistently applied between VA life insurance programs and it would require the VA to better publicize online

tools that allow veteran families to search for payments they may be entitled to. This bill was introduced by Reps. Chris Pappas (D-NH) and Nancy Mace (R-SC).

The bills now need to be considered by the Senate. With only a few months left in the 117th Congress, it is unclear whether they will receive consideration in the time remaining. Check the Government Affairs section of nalc.org for any future updates.

House passes bill to prevent overturn of presidential elections

On Sept. 21, in a 229-203 vote, the House passed the Presidential Election Reform Act (H.R. 8873). The bill, introduced by Reps. Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) and Liz Cheney (R-WY), would reform the process for the counting of electoral votes.

The legislation would solidify the vice president's role in the counting of electoral votes as “ministerial” and direct any challenges to state elections to the courts. Under current law, an objection from just one member of both the House and the Senate is enough to challenge state electors, which triggers a debate and vote on the objection. This bill would require one-third of the members of each chamber of Congress to object to the certification of a state's electors in order to trigger a debate.

This bill was crafted and passed in response to the attack on the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, and it aims to raise the bar for attempting to overturn an election and to discourage efforts to interfere with the peaceful transition of power.

A similar bill, the Electoral Count Reform and Presidential Transition Improvement Act of 2022 (S. 4573), is under consideration in the Senate. **PR**