



News from Washington

118th Congress convenes

The 118th Congress was set to convene on Jan. 3, after this issue went to print, with party control of the chambers divided. For the first time since 2018, Republicans have the majority in the House. Meanwhile, Democrats maintain control in the Senate.

In the House, 435 members—222 Republicans and 213 Democrats—were to be sworn in, giving Republicans narrow control of the chamber.

In the Senate, after Sen. Raphael Warnock (D-GA) won reelection in a runoff last month, Democrats were expected to hold 51 seats to the Republicans' 49. However, days after the Georgia runoff, Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (I-AZ) announced that she was switching her party registration from Democrat to independent. Sinema's announcement is not expected to affect Democrats' control in the Senate, and she stated that she plans to continue to caucus with the Democrats. Sinema will join two other Senate independents who also caucus with the Democrats, Sens. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and Angus King (I-ME).

Seven new senators were to be sworn in on Jan. 3: Katie Britt (R-AL), former Missouri Attorney General Eric Schmitt (R-MO), former Rep. Ted Budd (R-NC), J.D. Vance (R-OH), former Rep. Markwayne Mullin (R-OK), former Pennsylvania Lt. Gov. John Fetterman (D-PA), and former Rep. Peter Welch (D-VT).

Seventy-seven newly elected members will be joining the House. With 84 new members in total, including the seven senators, the 118th Congress is also growing in diversity. A record 149 women—107 Democrats and 42 Republicans—will serve, including 24 newly elected women. The new Con-

gress also includes five more military veterans than the 117th, with a total of 97 veterans—72 Republicans and 25 Democrats.

“While a divided Congress will present new challenges, with a majority of NALC-endorsed candidates winning in the midterm elections, we are fortunate to have many pro-letter carrier and pro-labor members of Congress by our side,” NALC President Brian L. Renfroe said. “NALC’s key to legislative success has always been working in a bipartisan manner. We will take the same approach in the 118th Congress and continue working on both sides of the aisle to enact policies that will improve the lives of letter carriers.”

House and Senate select party leaders

Republicans and Democrats in the House and Senate have selected their leaders for the 118th Congress. Formal elections will not be held until Jan. 3, when the new Congress is sworn in.

In the House, Republicans chose former House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) as their top leader. However, in the balloting for the Speaker of the House election, scheduled for Jan. 3, all 435 representatives will be eligible to vote. Rep. Steve Scalise (R-LA), the former minority whip, was unanimously selected as majority leader. Rep. Tom Emmer (R-MN), former chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC), was chosen to serve as majority whip. Rep. Elise Stefanik (R-NY) was selected as GOP conference chairwoman, and Rep. Richard Hudson (R-NC) was unanimously chosen to replace Emmer as NRCC chairman.

On the Democratic side, the party has chosen new leaders and approved changes to its leadership structure. Following the midterm elections, former Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and former Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) announced that they would remain in Congress but not seek leadership positions, paving the way for what Democrats are calling a new generation of leaders.

Former Democratic Caucus Chairman Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) was selected by acclamation to lead Democrats as minority leader, which would make him the first Black person to lead a party in either chamber of Congress. Rep. Katherine Clark (D-MA) was chosen as minority whip and Rep. Pete Aguilar (D-CA) was selected as chairman of the Democratic caucus. Both were unanimously approved.

Former Majority Whip Jim Clyburn (D-SC) was selected as assistant leader, a position that is now fourth in the leadership structure, instead of third. He was unopposed after Rep. David Cicilline (D-RI) dropped his bid for the position before the vote.

Rep. Ted Lieu (D-CA) was selected to serve as caucus vice chairman after four rounds of voting, defeating Reps. Debbie Dingell (D-MI), Joyce Beatty (D-OH) and Madeleine Dean (D-PA).

Structural changes to the caucus include approval for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) chairperson to be appointed by leadership, rather than selected by the caucus, and the creation of the Democratic Policy and Communications Committee. Rep. Joe Neguse (D-CO) was named by acclamation as chairman of the new committee. The caucus established another new

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leadership position that focuses on assisting candidates in competitive reelection campaigns—that of battleground leadership representative. Rep. Abigail Spanberger (D-VA) was chosen for this role.

In the Senate, Democrats chose their top leaders. Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) were both unanimously selected to once again fill those roles. Assistant Democratic Leader Patty Murray (D-WA) was elevated to president pro tempore, replacing Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT), who retired last year.

Democrats added a deputy conference secretary position to their leadership structure, which will replace the position of assistant leader. Sen. Brian Schatz (D-HI) was tapped for this role.

Other returning leaders include Democratic Policy and Communications Committee Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Steering Committee Chairwoman Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Conference Vice Chairpersons Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Mark Warner (D-VA).

Republicans also selected their top leaders. Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) defeated Rick Scott (R-FL) to continue in the party's top Senate position. Sen. John Thune (R-SD) will continue serving as minority whip, and Sen. John Barrasso (R-WY) was selected again as Republican conference chairman.

Stay tuned to the “Government Affairs” section of nalc.org for more updates on the 118th Congress.

Committee leadership update

The House Committee on Oversight and Reform (COR) and the Senate Homeland Security and Governmen-

tal Affairs Committee (HSGAC) are the primary congressional committees with jurisdiction for the Postal Service. Some leaders of these committees will change in the 118th Congress.

As this magazine was going to print, the caucuses had yet to officially announce who will lead committees. However, now under Republican control, COR is expected to be led by former Ranking Member James Comer (R-KY). The former top Democrat on the committee, Carolyn Maloney, lost her primary, so the party's top committee member will change. Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-MD), who received the endorsement of the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, is expected to serve as the ranking member.

HSGAC is again expected to be led by Chairman Gary Peters (D-MI). Following the retirement of former Ranking Member Rob Portman, Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY) is expected to serve as the ranking member.

Check the “Government Affairs” section of nalc.org for updates regarding the committees' leaders and members.

President Biden signs bill averting rail strike; paid sick leave measure excluded

On Dec. 2, President Biden signed a bill that forces a contract between rail workers and carriers. The legislation blocks rail workers from striking and implements a contract that was rejected by four of the 12 rail unions in September of 2022.

President Biden had called for congressional action to avert a rail strike, which would have disrupted the economy, costing as much as \$2 billion per day, according to some estimates.

On Nov. 30, in a 290-137 vote, the House passed the bill, and the Senate passed the bill with an 80-15 vote the next day.

While the contract includes a wage increase, among other positive elements, thousands of workers voted against its ratification due to the omission of paid sick leave. Currently, rail workers do not receive any paid sick leave, and they continued fighting for its inclusion in the contract.

Because many members of Congress said they would not support the legislation that forced the contract without a measure that provided paid sick leave for rail workers, a separate bill was introduced that would have provided seven days of paid sick leave for rail workers through the imposed contract.

This bill passed in the House with a 221-207 vote but fell short in the Senate with a 52-43 vote, failing to meet the 60-vote threshold needed for Senate passage.

“NALC is disappointed that paid sick leave for our rail union brothers and sisters did not pass in the Senate,” President Renfroe said. “Like letter carriers, rail workers’ labor is essential and keeps the American economy running. They deserve a fair workplace, which includes paid sick leave. NALC will continue advocating for this necessary leave for all working people.”

House and Senate calendars released; plan district visits with your members of Congress

The 2023 House and Senate congressional calendars have been released. It is important for letter carriers to familiarize themselves with the schedules

and to know when their representative and senators plan to be in their districts.

Recesses and district workweeks frequently occur around holidays, including the entire month of August. These are the best times to plan district visits with representatives. District visits are one of the best ways for letter carriers to get to know their representatives, educate them on letter carrier issues, and work to gain their support.

“Letter carriers’ work in the field directly translates to our victories in Washington,” President Renfroe said. “Every district visit is a chance to educate your representative on NALC’s legislative priorities. I encourage all NALC members to start organizing district visits now so that we can continue celebrating successes in the 118th Congress.”

Below are the scheduled dates for House and Senate district and state work periods.

2023 congressional calendar		
	House	Senate
New Year’s Day	Jan. 2	Jan. 2
Martin Luther King Jr. Day	Jan. 13-23	Jan. 4-20
Presidents Day	Feb. 10-24 March 2-6 March 13-21	Feb. 20-24 March 10-13 March 17-20
Easter	March 31-April 14 May 1-May 8	April 3-14 May 5-8
Memorial Day	May 26-June 2	May 22-29
Juneteenth	June 16-19	June 19
Independence Day	June 26-July 10 July 21-24	June 26-July 7 July 17 July 24
August recess/Labor Day	July 31-Sept. 11 Sept. 22-25	July 31-Sept. 4 Sept. 15 Sept. 25
Columbus Day	Oct. 2-Oct. 16 Oct. 27-Nov. 3	Oct. 9-13
Veterans Day	Nov. 10	Nov. 10
Thanksgiving	Nov. 17-Nov. 27	Nov. 20-24
Christmas	Dec. 15-29	Dec. 18-29

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House passes VA Employee Fairness Act in lame-duck session

On Dec. 15, during the lame-duck session of the 117th Congress, the House passed the VA Employee Fairness Act (H.R. 1948). This bipartisan bill, which passed in a 219-201 vote, would give collective-bargaining rights to Veterans Health Administration employees, who include nurses, physicians, dentists and physician assistants who care for veterans.

Currently, these employees are hired under Title 38 of the U.S. Code, which prohibits collective-bargaining rights for these workers. H.R. 1948, introduced by former House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman Mark Takano (D-CA), would remove this ban, which affects nearly 100,000 employees.

"For our country to ensure that veterans receive the highest quality treatment, we must treat VA front-line health care workers with the same level of dignity and respect as other federal health care workers," Rep. Takano said. "Throughout the 117th Congress, this committee prioritized providing veterans with the health care they earned, and we are reinforcing that by providing VA's front-line workers, who wholeheartedly provide critical care for veterans, with the workers' rights they deserve."

"NALC applauds the House on the passage of this bill," President Renfroe said. "These federal workers who treat our nation's veterans deserve the right to collectively bargain for a better workplace. NALC supports this bill and the expansion of collective bargaining in all fields."

The legislation needed to be approved by the Senate before the new Congress convened. As this magazine was going to print, a Senate vote had not been held.

Congress releases end-of-year omnibus package; includes increased funding for NLRB

As this magazine was going to print, Congress had released its end-of-year omnibus package. At press time, the House and the Senate had not yet voted on the expansive package; however, it was expected to pass in both chambers.

Overall, the 12-bill appropriations package includes \$1.7 trillion to fund the government. This includes \$858 billion in defense spending, a \$76 billion increase from Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, and \$772.5 billion in discretionary spending, a \$42.5 billion increase from FY 2022. This funding would provide \$44.9 billion in emergency aid for Ukraine, \$118.7 billion for medical care provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs and \$38 billion for assistance in recovery from natural disasters. The package also includes a provision that would solidify the vice president's role in the counting of electoral votes as "ministerial," in response to legislation that was introduced in both chambers following the attack on the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

Notably, for the first time since 2014, Congress included increased funding for the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). The package provides \$299.2 million for the agency. This is about \$25 million more than the \$274 million that the agency has received over the

past eight years; however, it falls short of the \$319.4 million the Biden administration requested. The NLRB makes important decisions that can affect the organizing efforts of unions, and the agency also provides critical support for existing unions. The NLRB warned of furloughs and delays in its daily operations if the agency did not receive an increase in funding in 2023. The additional \$254 million is likely sufficient to avoid furloughs.

"NALC is pleased to see Congress increase funding for the NLRB," President Renfroe said. "NALC members, and all unionized workers, rely on the NLRB to oversee their elections and protect their rights as workers. Investment in the NLRB is an investment in the American workforce."

Also of note: No language regarding six-day mail and package delivery was needed in the omnibus bill. The Postal Service Reform Act codified six-day delivery into law, and NALC no longer must rely on the appropriations process to ensure six-day delivery across the country.

NALC also made a push to include the Social Security Fairness Act (SSFA), which would repeal the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) titles of the Social Security Act, in the end-of-year spending package. Ultimately, these efforts were unsuccessful and the provisions in the SSFA were excluded from the package. The SSFA is expected to be introduced early in the 118th Congress, and NALC will continue working to gain co-sponsors to move this priority legislation forward. **PR**