



# e-NAPUS Legislative & Political Bulletin

May 26, 2006

Volume 3, Number 18



Rolling Thunder Crossing Arlington Memorial Bridge on Memorial Day 2005

## Rolling Thunder – Simmering Deliberations

Frequently, during the week prior to a recess, Congress compresses legislative debate, political intrigue and impulsive action into a volatile parcel. The past few days have lived up to this exhilarating reputation. And these activities will undoubtedly impact the future of pending postal legislation.

On Saturday, May 20, the FBI raided the Capitol Hill office of Rep. William Jefferson (D-LA), searching for documents that could prove his involvement in a pending corruption investigation. The FBI search of his legislative office is unprecedented, and may be an unconstitutional breach of the “separation of powers”. There has been a bipartisan bicameral outcry about constitutional implications of the Executive Branch (i.e., the Justice Department) infringing on the prerogatives of the Legislative Branch. In fact, House Speaker Dennis Hastert expressed his outrage to President George Bush. On Thursday, the President ordered that the FBI seized records be sealed for 45 days, pending a Legislative-Executive Branch compromise. At about the same time that the Presidential order came down, an *unnamed* FBI source leaked to ABC News that Hastert was under investigation for an alleged political relationship with former lobbyist Jack Abramoff. The Speaker blamed the Bush Administration for the leak, as retaliation for the complaint about the Jefferson office raid. Notwithstanding the substance of the dispute, it is clear that a caustic political rift has opened between the White House and GOP Congressional majority. This rift can and will influence legislative deliberations between the White House and Congress. One such matter could be the ongoing deliberations between Congress and the Administration regarding postal reform, specifically the outstanding CSRS issues, and whether a White House veto threat would have any juice in such a political environment.

Ironically, on Tuesday, Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Susan Collins and House Government Reform Committee Chairman Tom Davis met with White House Chief-of-Staff Josh Bolton and Deputy Chief-of-Staff Joel Kaplan regarding postal reform. First hand reports indicate that the White House meeting went very well and that postal reform continues to be an Administration priority. Both Chairmen underscored the magnitude of completing legislative action as soon as possible. House and Senate Committee staff members continue to work on reconciling a number of unresolved issues in the House-passed and Senate-passed versions of the bill. However, there remain a handful of key issues that will have to be resolved by members of the House-Senate Conference Committee themselves. These issues include the authority of the postal regulatory authority, the ability of the USPS to defer rates from one year to another, the conditions under which the USPS may seek a rate adjustment beyond the CPI, and the classification of single-piece parcels. Also, Conferees will have to work out a number of matters

with the Administration on those issues that the White House has identified as essential. While all this dialogue is going on, NAPUS has been meeting with staff members, Members of Congress, and the Congressional Leadership.

In the midst of all this activity, it is important to recognize that the bipartisan House and Senate Leadership assign considerable weight to enactment of postal reform. In fact, on Tuesday morning, NAPUS joined in a breakfast with Republican Policy Committee Chairman Adam Putnam (R-FL), which was attended by about 75 government relations professionals. At the meeting, Putnam volunteered that H.R. 22 was one of the major pieces of legislation that the House passed last year. Also, this week, NAPUS attended a meeting with Senate Democratic Whip Richard Durbin (D-IL) where he acknowledged the significance of S. 662, the bipartisan Senate-passed bill. On Thursday, key House Rules Committee Member Pete Sessions (R-TX) spoke with NAPUS President Dale Goff and NAPUS Secretary-Treasurer Bob Rapoza about his desire to see this bill on the President's desk as soon as possible. And, finally, NAPUS participated in a small meeting with House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-IL), where he indicated that he wanted to see action on the bill completed as soon as possible. Moreover, the Speaker expressed dismay that the bill has yet to be enacted. NAPUS pledged to continue working with Members of Congress to ensure that the bill sent to the President will protect affordable universal postal services.

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## House Subcommittee Approves Limited Funds for USPS

At about 11:30 PM, on Thursday evening, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury, Housing and Urban Development, Judiciary and District of Columbia approved a \$67.8 billion bill, which funds a handful of government agencies and the District of Columbia. Rep. Joe Knollenberg (R-MI) chairs the Subcommittee and Rep. John Olver (D-MA) is the Ranking Democrat.

The legislation includes funds to reimburse the USPS for costs associated with free mail for the blind and overseas voting. In addition, the bill provides a postage subsidy for non-profit mailers. The USPS requested a total of \$152.7 million to cover these costs. The White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) recommended \$79.9 million. The Appropriations Subcommittee settled on \$108 million – \$44.7 million less than the USPS requested and \$29 million more than OMB suggestion.

Although the USPS portion of the appropriations bill is small, this is the first time in recent memory that the Appropriations Subcommittee did not invite the Postmaster General to testify in support of the agency's funding request. NAPUS inquired about the USPS absence from the hearing agenda. The Subcommittee told NAPUS that severe time constraints precluded USPS participation. In the past, Subcommittee members have explored with the PMG agency operations, including staffing levels, automation, and mail security. In addition, they brought up parochial issues important to their individual congressional districts. Also, Appropriations Subcommittee hearings provided a forum for UPS loyalist Rep. Ann Northup (R-KY) to interrogate Postal officials on behalf of the parcel shipping giant.

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