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Senate Committee Vets Postal Governor Nominees

On Wednesday, the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee conducted a hearing to consider three Presidential nominees to the USPS Board of Governors. The nominees are Ellen Williams (R-KY), Katherine Tobin (D-NY), and Mickey Barnett (R-NM). Unless there are any surprises, in mid-July, it is expected that the Committee will recommend that the Senate confirm the nominees. As the *eNAPUS Bulletin* pointed out last week, confirmation of the three nominees would still leave two Democratic vacancies on the Board. Committee Member Tom Carper mentioned that the White House is presently clearing for nomination two Democrats to fill the remaining openings -- one which has not been filled since 2002.

Upon introducing Mickey Barnett to the Governmental Affairs Committee, Senior Member Pete Domenici (R-NM) took a few moments to highlight the importance of getting H.R. 22, the postal reform legislation, to the White House. He remarked, "the sooner, the better" and continued, "we should bring it up and get it done!" Chairman Susan Collins mused to the nominees that there "has not been a strong relationship between the Board of Governors and Congress". Collins appeared to signal Williams, Tobin, and Barnett that she hoped that their addition to the Board would help improve the strained relationship.

The nominees were unanimous in recognizing that universal service is fundamental to the existence of the USPS. Ms. Tobin emotionally recalled how important it was for her to receive mail from her father, who was serving the country in the U.S. Navy. The nominees also articulated support for postal accountability and transparency. They identified factors as essential to the success of labor-management relations. In addition, the nominees acknowledged that accountability and transparency should characterize interactions with other postal stakeholders.

Chairman Collins queried the panel about their views on the importance post offices. The Chairman noted the necessity of post offices to serve rural communities. She also underscored the importance of clear and published standards for closing a post office, if necessary, and that there is meaningful community input in the process. All the nominees recognized the importance of post offices and the necessity of community input.

The only real drama involved some questions directed at Barnett relating to allegations that he exploited his seat on the Republican National Committee to benefit his law firm. In addition, the Committee released Barnett's answers to written questions about his association with organizations, such as the National Right to Work Committee and the Americans for Tax Reform.



Have a Great July 4th

Pre-Independence Day Slogging

During the week before the July 4th Recess, NAPUS continued to meet with key Senators and Representatives and highlight the essential elements that need to be part of the H.R. 22 Conference Agreement. Ironically, many Members of Congress are asking NAPUS about when the Agreement will reach the House and the Senate floors. Consequently, the Congressional Recess offers postmasters the opportunity to remind their Members of Congress that postal reform legislation is still awaiting a House-Senate Conference Agreement, and that the resulting legislation must provide the CSRS relief, and the opportunity for the USPS to request the postal regulator to adjust rates beyond the CPI in "exigent" situations. The other NAPUS H.R. 22 positions are outlined on the Government Relations page of the NAPUS Website (www.napus.org).

The Senate is poised to get the Conference underway, yet the House still needs to appoint its managers. Moreover, it appears that the staff has resolved many mundane and pedestrian issues, leaving the major differences for the actual conferees to decide. Among the outstanding issues are status of single-piece parcels, the "exigency matter," the flexibility of the USPS to defer a rate increases from one year to another, and the authority of the postal regulatory to establish and adjust the rate system.

NAPUS and others will be using the July 4th break to prepare for the homestretch. We should anticipate that House and Senate Conferees will begin their discussions after the recess. It is important to note that when the Conference actually begins, internal memos will be flying back-and-forth among the conferees, and, possibly with the White House. Furthermore, NAPUS may be requested to provide on-the-spot analysis of proposed modifications to H.R. 22 and how these changes would impact postmasters.



Sen. Lincoln Chafee
(R-RI)

Ocean State GOP Primary

Last week, the *eNAPUS Bulletin* referenced the CT Democratic Primary. This week the *Bulletin* is spotlighting the GOP primary in the state to its north, Rhode Island. On September 12, Rhode Island GOP voters, of which there are not many, will head to the polls to select either freshman Sen. Lincoln Chafee, or Cranston Mayor Steve Laffey as their nominee in the November general election. Chafee has been a strong supporter of postmasters and has worked with NAPUS on issues that come before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. Like Sen. Lieberman, the Sen. to his south, Chafee has earned the wrath of vocal party activists in his state party. Chafee's voting record is fairly moderate and he works across the aisle.

Laffey is a conservative populist who has decried Chafee's votes against tax cuts and Judge Alito. Also, he has questioned Senator Chafee's party loyalty. Nonetheless, the National Republican Senatorial Committee has pulled out all the stops to help Chafee defeat Laffey. Inasmuch as there is a significant moderate lean in the state, the GOP has concluded that should the moderate Chafee loses to conservative Laffey, the Democrats will win the seat in November. One major advantage that Chafee has in the primary is that "Independents" can vote in the GOP primary. A plurality of RI's registered voters are independents. Interestingly, about 14,500 Democrats have changed to Independents in order to cast their votes in the GOP primary.

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