



e-NAPUS Legislative Newsletter

September 9, 2005

Volume 2, Number 32

Katrina's Legislative Undertow

It is still too soon to evaluate the long-term impact that Hurricane Katrina will have on postal reform and other priorities. In addition, it may be months before we can evaluate the effect that the storm has had on the economy, and longer for us to know how storm-ravaged Gulf Coast communities, including New Orleans, will be resurrected. However, Congress and the White House seem to be committed to rush much-needed aid to hurricane victims.

On Thursday, at the request of President Bush, the House followed the Senate, approving a \$51.8 billion hurricane relief package. This amount is projected to cover recovery and relief expenses just through mid-October. So far, the total amount approved by Congress for Katrina-related relief is \$62.3 billion. (Interestingly, the annual cost of U.S. efforts in Iraq is about \$51 billion.)

The hurricane fallout has far-reaching political, legislative and operational repercussions for the USPS and the entire mailing community. Many Gulf Coast residents are still unaccounted for and communities are just emerging from the chaos. At the same time, federal officials are attempting to deflect accountability for emergency preparedness and crisis management. It is premature to predict how the charged atmosphere will be a factor in congressional elections that are 13 months away, but many elected officials are genuinely nervous. The most recent polling numbers have President Bush's approval rating hovering at an all time low of 40%; and Congress is languishing in the mid-to-low 30s. The anxiety has manifested itself in the House Republican Leadership gripping a short leash on any House investigation over Hurricane relief efforts. Early this week, House Government Reform Chairman Tom Davis announced his intention to conduct hearings on the issue. However, House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, upon learning of Davis' plans, quickly quashed the hearings.

For the USPS, postal employees are struggling to reconnect the hundreds of thousands of relocated Gulf Coast residents with the postal network. This includes processing countless "change of address" requests. It is abundantly clear that disasters, whether man-made or the result of "mother nature", demonstrate the necessity of an accessible universal postal system. So many Americans depend on their local post offices for financial resources, health-related products, government information and hard-copy communications. In addition, in limitless communities, the postmaster is the sole government official. Therefore, it is vital to local businesses and Gulf Coast residents that post offices damaged during the storm be repaired and staffed expeditiously. In numerous towns and communities raising the American flag by the post office will be the first symbol of recovery.

Collateral casualties of Congressional preoccupation with storm relief are pre-existing legislative priorities and the legislative calendar. Prior to Katrina's

"Good morning
America how are you?

Don't you know I am
your native son,

I'm the train they call
the City of New
Orleans,

I'll be gone five
hundred miles when
the day is done."

"The City of New
Orleans"

By Steve Goodman &
Popularized by Arlo
Guthrie

landfall, Congress intended to adjourn for the year at the end of September. However, Congress has yet to send to the President ten appropriations bills, and the House Republican Leadership is still musing about tax legislation. Consequently, it is doubtful that Congress will be able to get out of town prior to Thanksgiving, if then. In addition, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist has asked Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Chairman Susan Collins to head up the Senate investigation of the federal response to Hurricane Katrina. This new and politically sensitive responsibility may distract temporarily Chairman Collins from getting S. 662 to the Senate floor. On the other hand, the delayed adjournment target permits the Senator and her staff more time to work out one of the major remaining obstacles to Senate floor consideration, the Hallmark issue.

Postmaster Relationships

Throughout the week, Congressional offices have been inquiring about the well-being of Gulf Coast postmasters and their team. In a large part, these inquiries are a byproduct of years of relationships rooted in open, continuous and candid communications between postmasters and their elected representatives. These congressional calls did not come solely from the offices of Gulf Coast Members of Congress. They came from Congressional offices throughout the country.

One of the calls into NAPUS Headquarters was from a congressional staff person who partook in one of our *Congressional Post Office Road Trips*. The staff person wanted to know how an in-harms-way postmaster prepares for an impending storm. Then, almost on cue, the staff person partially answered her own question, recalling how during her postal visit the postmaster was "clearing the house" in anticipation for an approaching snow storm. Of course, Hurricane Katrina was exponentially more serious than a passing winter weather event. But, it is noteworthy that the staff person focused on the issue of moving mail expeditiously out of a postal facility, recognizing the value of the mail and protection of its security.

In the wake of Congressional Katrina-related activity, the Senate will come back to S. 662, the Postal Enhancement and Accountability Act. Certainly, this is the hope of Chairman Collins and others who have invested so much of their time in crafting postal reform legislation. Therefore, postmasters must continue to communicate openly, candidly and continuously on still-to-be-resolved issues in the postal legislation.

Therefore NAPUS members must persist in urging that the measure sent to the President:

- Eliminate the CSRS escrow account and restore U.S. Treasury responsibility to finance the CSRS military retirement obligation
- Provide appropriate postal rate flexibility, including the opportunity to respond to unforeseen or extraordinary events, and permit the USPS to defer unused rate authority (i.e., rate-banking) for a specified period
- Protect rural and residential customer, and small businesses by classifying single-piece parcels as a market dominant product
- Safeguard legally guaranteed employee health and retirement benefits



NAPUS
Congressional Post
Office Road Trip

Government Relations

National Association of
Postmasters of the U.S.

8 Hebert Street
Alexandria, VA 22305

Tel. 703-683-9027
Fax. 703-683-0923

Email: blevi@napus.org

We are on the Web!