



eNAPUS Legislative & Political Bulletin

November 17, 2006

Volume 3, Number 36

“The Parting on the Left is Now the Parting on the Right” – The WHO



Speaker-Elect Nancy Pelosi and Incoming House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer

This week, House and Senate partisans selected their Leadership Teams for the 110th Congress, which begins on January 4, 2007. First, the Senate Democrats and GOP selected their leaders. The Democrats selected Sen. Harry Reid (D-NV) as Majority Leader and Sen. Richard Durbin (D-IL) as Majority Whip. The GOP selected Mitch McConnell (R-KY) as Minority Leader and Sen. Trent Lott (R-MS) as GOP Whip.

On Thursday, the House Democratic Caucus bestowed the crown jewel to Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), who will assume the Constitutional office of the Speaker of the House of Representatives. This places Pelosi, the first female Speaker in our nation's history, second in line of presidential succession (i.e., after Vice President Cheney). The Democrats also selected Rep. James Clyburn (D-SC) as Democratic Whip. The House GOP selected Rep. John Boehner as Minority Leader and Rep. Roy Blunt (R-MO) as GOP Whip.

However, the marquis event took place at about 10:15 AM Thursday, a contest for the next Majority Leader, pitting House Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer (D-MD) against House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee Ranking Democrat John Murtha (D-PA). Murtha had the strong backing of Pelosi, while the overwhelming majority of incoming House Chairmen supported Hoyer. The leadership contest simmered for the past five months, but it broke into open warfare when Rep. Pelosi sent out endorsement letter on November 12. The Hoyer-Murtha battle had it all – scandal, arm-twisting, political threats, loyalty oaths, etc. Despite the family feud, Murtha and Hoyer have had a longstanding relationship with postmasters. For years, they sat side-by-side on the House Appropriations Committee, helping further the interests of NAPUS. In fact, prior to 1995, Rep. Hoyer chaired the Treasury-Postal Appropriations Subcommittee where he took a particular interest in ensuring that postal service standards were not compromised. In fact, in the early 1990's when PMG Marvin Runyon restructured the USPS, resulting in service problems, Hoyer conducted hearings and called for an investigation into how the restructuring impacted mail service. In addition, Hoyer represents a large number of federal and postal employed constituents. Consequently, Hoyer has been in the ramparts protecting the federal retirement system and health benefit program. In this highly-charged leadership race, Hoyer prevailed convincingly 149-86.



Incoming Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and Incoming Democratic Whip Richard Durbin

NAPUS President Dale Goff conveyed his congratulations to the new the Leadership Teams and pledged that postmasters will continue to work closely with the Congress to safeguard quality mail services for their constituents, both at home and on Capitol Hill. Moreover, NAPUS attended a number of Leadership events this week to personally extend our best wishes for a successful 110th Congress.

Democratic
Members of Senate
Homeland Security
and Governmental
Affairs Committee
in the 110th
Congress

Joseph Lieberman
(CT) Chair
Carl Levin (MI)
Daniel Akaka (HI)
Tom Carper (DE)
Mark Pryor (AR)
Mary Landrieu (LA)
Barack Obama (IL)
Claire McCaskill (MO)
Jon Tester (MT)

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Confirmation Hearing Touches on Communication and Service

On Tuesday, Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Susan Collins (R-ME) conducted a confirmation hearing for Postal Rate Commission nominee Dan Blair, and Board of Governor Nominees James Bilbray and Thurgood Marshall, Jr. (Bilbray is a current Governor.)

At the hearing's outset, Chairman Collins reflected on the misunderstandings that have plagued the Congressional-USPS relations. Gov. Bilbray, a former Member of Congress, acknowledged the problem, and indicated that the Board is contemplating the establishment of a Legislative Subcommittee to better coordinate Board of Governor communications with Capitol Hill. He believed that this would enhance the Board's legislative influence and credibility. Gov. Bilbray also stated that he believes that the Board should engage Congress earlier in the legislative process, rather than weigh-in at the tail end. Nominee Marshall, a former Senate Committee staff member and a member of former VP Al Gore's team, agreed with Bilbray. Another issue that Chairman Collins raised is how the USPS' budget, resulting from a precipitous decline in first class mail, would impact mail service. She highlighted the affect that cost-cutting could have on small and rural post offices. The nominees all recognized the important role that post offices play. Gov. Bilbray explicitly spoke about the intangible benefit that small post offices play and remarked that his great aunt was both a postmaster and midwife in Ethel, LA. In addition, he spoke about the need for the Governors to travel to these retail postal facilities to understand their importance to the community. Nominee Marshall added that in many cases the post office is a "community focal point." Marshall also noted that the postal facilities are politically important and that constituent postal needs must be addressed. Both Bilbray and Marshall testified that they believe that USPS service standards should be public and transparent. Nominee Marshall noted that the USPS is one of very few federal agencies that actually monitors performance. He added that this information, which should be posted on the USPS website, must be "useful and timely."

On Thursday, the Committee approved the nominees for Senate confirmation, which is expected to take place when Congress returns after the Thanksgiving.

Postal Reform Still Breathing

H.R. 22 continues to be on life-support, after suffering a near-death experience in late September. The major outstanding issues that separate the House and the Senate remain, but a deal is possible. Leading House and Senate Postal Reform advocates are attempting to craft a compromise that would address the three chief issues: the nature of the new rate system, the status of mailer work-sharing discounts, and the NALC objection to the Senate workers' compensation language.

The Congressional postal reform leaders need to deliver a compromise to the House and Senate during the week of December 4th. It is not clear how long the Congress will remain in session, although there are Capitol Hill rumors that 109th Congress could lengthen until Christmas eve – but nobody is counting on it. The duration of this lame duck session is contingent upon the resolution of some unsettled Appropriations bills – not postal reform.