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Happy Holidays from
the National
Association of
Postmasters of the U.S.
Headquarters



December 20
1st Anniversary of
Postal Reform

Congress Spreads Holiday Cheer – Leaves Town

On Wednesday evening, Congress beat a hasty retreat from Washington. With a 22% job approval rating and an impending election year, the incentive to leave was overwhelming. Before Members of Congress confiscated Santa's sleigh to fly out of town, they sent the President the Fiscal Year 2008 Omnibus Appropriations Act. The legislation (H.R. 2764) includes 11 of the 12 annual spending bills, financing Federal agencies to the tune of \$555 billion. It is important to note that appropriations bills do not fund "entitlement programs," such as Social Security, Medicare, federal retirement and interest on the national debt. Entitlement programs are authorized by law, and can be modified only by amending the underlying statute that establishes the program.

Revenue Forgone Saved

Among the appropriations goodies buried in the bill was \$117.9 million for the USPS. The appropriation reimburses the agency for providing free mail for the blind, overseas voters, and the U.S. military. In addition, the legislation continues the \$29 million payment for the congressionally-mandated nonprofit mail subsidy. Earlier this year, the Senate Appropriations bill contained the \$29 million; however, the original House version did not. NAPUS, the USPS and others successfully communicated the importance of the revenue forgone appropriation to the chairmen of the respective postal appropriations subcommittees, Rep. Jose Serrano (D-NY) and Sen. Richard Durbin (D-IL).

Congress Attentive to Staffing Inadequacies

A narrative document accompanies appropriations legislation. This "report" provides detailed spending instructions agency directives, and sometimes restrictions. H.R. 2764 includes such a report and contains language relating to postal staffing levels. The report instructs the USPS to:

"...solicit and take into consideration the view of local postal management in the development of appropriate staffing levels to ensure that postal customers receive the quality mail service that they expect and deserve. The Committee directs that the Postal Service report in writing 180 days after enactment of this act to Committees on Appropriations of the Senate and House of Representatives, the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, and the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform on the steps taken to achieve this objective."

Consequently, Congress expects a USPS staffing report in May 2008. As Postmasters know, deficient staffing not only hurts customer service, but it also has a deleterious effect on the workplace. Management and craft

employees acknowledge this phenomenon for a variety of reasons, all of which command Congressional and regulatory attention. First, inadequate staffing forces local management to perform tasks that should be carried out by craft employees. Management performance of such functions may violate existing collective-bargaining agreements. Second, there are Fair Labor Standard Act (FLSA) implications if management performs craft functions more than half the time. Specifically, many managers exempt from the FLSA and not eligible for "overtime pay" would be eligible for overtime if the majority of their day is spent performing craft functions. The Department of Labor is tasked with enforcing the FLSA.

NAPUS believe that the USPS should address the staffing needs of postal facilities through constructive and productive discussions with local Postmasters – and Congress will be keeping tab on this.

Lieberman Endorsement of McCain Could Have Repercussions

On Monday, Sen. Joseph Lieberman (I-CT), the 2000 Democratic VP nominee, endorsed Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) for President. The Lieberman endorsement is an attempt to bolster McCain's sagging support among GOP stalwarts and to energize independent New Hampshire voters. A NH loss would be fatal to McCain's presidential hopes. (NH independents may vote in the presidential primary.) Sens. Lieberman and McCain have similar views on foreign policy and national security. In addition, Sen. McCain's former press secretary is the communications director for Lieberman. It should also be noted that, earlier this year, Sen. Lieberman endorsed Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME) for reelection.

The McCain/Collins endorsements may have ripple effects for the postal and federal community, since Sen. Lieberman chairs the Committee with jurisdiction over federal and postal matters. Presently, Lieberman is the Democratic majority-maker in the Senate. Although he is identified as an "Independent", he caucuses with Democrats. Without Lieberman, the Democrats can count on only 50 senators, including Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT). The breakdown would be 50-50, if Lieberman caucused with the GOP – VP Cheney would be the tie-breaker. Consequently, Democrats feared that Lieberman would jump ship if they denied him his chair. Moreover, the Lieberman-chaired Committee has been hailed as a model of bipartisanship and productivity in a highly divisive Congress. Nonetheless, the upcoming 2008 elections could change the Senate dynamic, yielding to a stronger Democratic majority that may try to deny Lieberman his chairmanship, as a payback for the McCain endorsement.

It appears that Democrats could pick up 3-5 Senate seats. Therefore, there may be a diminished necessity to accommodate Sen. Lieberman with a chair. If the Democrats strip Lieberman of his chair, the Democrats would need to look down the Committee list to see who Sen. Lieberman's Democratic successor could be. The most senior committee Democrat is Sen. Carl Levin (D-MI); however, it is doubtful that he would relinquish the chair of the Armed Service Committee. Next on the list is Sen. Daniel Akaka (D-HI); he presently chairs the Veterans Affairs Committee. After Akaka is Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE); although he chairs a subcommittee, he does not chair a Full Senate Committee. Of course, we will have to wait a year to see what happens.

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