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NAPUS Helps Deflect Overseas Ballot Privatization



On April 15, the Congressional Committee on House Administration conducted a hearing on the distribution, collection, and delivery of military and overseas election ballots. The testimony focused the failure of state election authorities to count many of the votes cast by members of the U.S. Armed Forces and civilians living abroad. Under current law, the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act established the procedures for absentee military voting. Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) sought to address the problem through legislation, the Military Voting Protection Act (H.R. 5673). Though well-intentioned, the legislation sanctions private-carriage of mail and does little to improve the tabulation of military and overseas votes.

A week ago, NAPUS learned that the Committee was poised to take up H.R. 5673 on Wednesday, April 30; however, as the result of aggressive grassroots activity, the Committee elected to defer action on the bill. The entire postal community raised concern about H.R. 5673, including Postmaster General Jack Potter. NAPUS alerted Postmasters in the states whose Representative serve on the Committee and communicated Postmaster objection of the legislation.

H.R. 5673 would require the Department of Defense to establish procedures for “private courier” collection and delivery of absentee military ballots. The proposal is contrary to the “private express statutes”. Moreover, the USPS already enjoys a longstanding and close partnership with the Military Postal Service Agency (MPSA) in handling military election mail, through Army/Air Force and Fleet Post Offices. Consequently, the USPS and the MPSA communicate with local election authorities to handle election material as expeditiously as possible.

Unfortunately, the failure to tabulate all the military ballots is primarily attributable to inaccurate destination addresses and tardy ballot preparation by the local election authorities; the problem is not the transport or processing of military absentee ballots. In fact, this is what the Government Accountability Office (GAO) suggested. Therefore, it is irrelevant who carries the military ballot, if the address of the military voter is wrong or the local election authority fails to print the ballot until a week prior to the election. Neither, FedEx, DHL or the USPS will be able to deliver it. Rather, a more successful approach to dealing with overseas military voting would be to work with local election authorities to update their voter rolls, to ensure that they have good destination points for overseas voters and encourage the authorities to prepare the ballots far enough in advance to ensure that every American citizen, not matter where on the globe they are stationed, is able to take part in the most elemental US responsibility – the vote.



Committee Approves Ban on Mailing Tobacco

On May 1, the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, by voice vote, approved HR 5912, legislation to prohibit the transportation of cigarettes and other tobacco products through the US mail. Rep. John McHugh (R-NY) introduced the bill, and Committee Chairman Henry Waxman (D-CA), Ranking Member Tom Davis (R-VA), and Postal Subcommittee Chairman Danny Davis (D-IL) cosponsored the measure. The legislation has yet to be scheduled for full House consideration.

The previous week, the Postal Subcommittee conducted a hearing on tobacco mailability. Witnesses included the CT Attorney General, the Executive Director of the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, a representative from the New York City Law Department, and the USPS General Counsel. Witnesses raised two major reasons to ban tobacco products from the mail stream (similar to alcohol): underage access to tobacco and tax avoidance. According to the testimony, about 700 internet sites market cigarettes – many of the sellers are “off-shore.” The sellers are able to undersell in-state purveyors, by avoiding state and local excise taxes. Moreover, the anonymity of the internet enables children to purchase tobacco products. It was pointed out that UPS, DHL and FedEx have entered into an agreement not to transport tobacco products. Consequently, about 90% of internet-purchased tobacco was transported through the mail. The USPS General Counsel identified ways in which the Postal Service is working with state authorities to curtail illegal tobacco transactions. However, the USPS Counsel identified a number of difficulties in eradicating tobacco from the mail system, even with the legislative prohibition.

NAPUS President to Testify at Postal Subcommittee Hearing

The House Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on the Federal Workforce, Postal Service and District of Columbia has scheduled a Postal Oversight hearing for next week – Thursday, May 8. Despite conflicts with travels to NAPUS Chapter Convention schedule, President Dale Goff has accepted Chairman Danny Davis’ invitation to testify. The witnesses will include the PMG and Chairman of Postal Board of Governors, the Chairman of the Postal Regulatory Commission, the Postal Inspector General, and representative of the postal employee associations. The hearing is entitled, “the Economics of Universal Mail Post-Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act.” The Subcommittee intends to explore how the Postal Service has taken advantage of Public Law 109-435 to enhance its economic situation. In addition, the Subcommittee is interested from the witnesses about lingering contracting-out issues and staffing issues, as well as a variety of other operational and organization matters.

Postmasters may view the hearing, which begins at 2:00 PM; the hearing will probably last for 2-3 hours, on the House Oversight and Government Reform website at <http://oversight.house.gov/hearings.asp>. You may need to navigate the site a bit to link to the hearing.

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