



eNAPUS Legislative & Political Bulletin

July 10, 2009

Volume 6, Number 11



Rep. Ed Towns
Chairman
House Oversight and
Government Reform
Committee

House Committee OKs Emergency Postal Relief Bill for House Vote

Earlier today, the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee favorably reported H.R. 22, emergency postal relief legislation, by a unanimous voice vote. During the Committee "mark-up," Chairman Ed Towns (D-NY) pointed out that the legislation provides a temporary financial lifeline to the Postal Service "with not a single taxpayer dollar." In addition, Ranking GOP Committee Member Darrel Issa (R-CA) observed that H.R. 22 is "the most bipartisan bill that we worked on this year." Federal Workforce, the Postal Service and the District of Columbia Subcommittee Chair Steve Lynch (D-MA) remarked that the USPS is in crisis mode and that given the present situation the agency may have "trouble meeting payroll." The bipartisanship referenced by Rep. Issa reflected the collaborative efforts of the Postal employee groups to garner the support of 337 members of the House of Representatives.

For its part, upon Subcommittee approval of H.R. 22, NAPUS activated its Legislative Activist Network in those states with Members of Congress serving on the Oversight and Government Reform Committee. The State Legislative Chairs, hailing from the twenty-eight states (including the District of Columbia) contacted the Committee members, in their home districts during the July 4th Recess to reassert NAPUS' strong support of H.R. 22 and urged prompt consideration upon Congress' return in July. On Monday, the Committee advised NAPUS that H.R. 22 was scheduled for a vote on Friday (today). We immediately called upon our Network to send a simple message to Committee members: "Vote in favor of H.R. 22, with no amendments." Message clarity proved crucial because there was a bit of message-fracturing by some in the postal world. For example, there was scuttlebutt that efforts were underway by some in the postal world to add a provision permitting five-day mail, and there was another rumor that some were pushing to increase employee health insurance contributions. These misguided and legislatively destructive efforts were unhelpful and diverted attention from the mission, providing emergency temporary postal relief. Moreover, these tactics undermine a level of trust that must exist when more substantive and more far-reaching postal legislation is pursued. To do otherwise, dooms efforts on behalf of the mailing public.

Although the House Leadership has yet to schedule H.R. 22 for floor action, all Postmasters should contact their Members of Congress urging them to vote in favor of the measure when it comes up for a vote. They should mention that the bill continues to enjoy overwhelming bipartisan support, was approved unanimously by both the Subcommittee of jurisdiction and the full Committee. The Government Relations Department will be sending out more specific information, as it becomes available, through NAPUS' Legislative Action Network and this publication.

NAPUS “Intervenes” in Facility Consolidation Initiative

On Tuesday, NAPUS “intervened” in the deliberations that Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC) is undertaking relating to the Postal Service’s “Station and Branch Optimization and Consolidation Initiative,” Docket N2009-1. The PRC involvement in this matter stems from its statutory review authority, which predates the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act.

In May, the Postal Service announced that it will be examining about 3,200 postal stations and branches for possible “closure or curtailment.” Depending on the outcome of the initial review, and the remaining 1,600 stations and branches may be evaluated for closure or curtailment. The USPS goal is to “identify and take advantage of opportunities for increased efficiency.” The USPS goes on to state in its PRC filing that it also seeks to maintain postal accessibility. While the Initiative does not affect small and rural post offices, it will impact the operations of urban and suburban post offices, where multiple branches and stations are subordinate to the post office. For this reason, NAPUS President Goff elected to intervene with the PRC.

The USPS Optimization Initiative resulted from the current economic conditions and the persistent decline in mail volume. On July 2, the USPS requested that the PRC determine whether the nationwide reorganization of postal branches and stations, as described in the initiative, represents “a nationwide change in the nature of postal services.” If the PRC decides affirmatively on this point, the Postal Service is seeking an “advisory opinion” as to whether the change is consistent with existing postal law (i.e., Title 39 of the United States Code).



MN NAPUS Members
with Sen. Al Franken
and NBC Reporter Ed
Rabel

Al Franken Makes Sixty

On Tuesday, Al Franken (D-MN) was finally sworn in as a U.S. Senator. The contentious election recount left Minnesota without its full complement of Senators for six months. Counting the two independents who caucus with the Democrats (Senators Joseph Lieberman and Bernie Sanders), the Democrats claim a sixty-vote super-majority. It is important to note that in the Senate it takes sixty votes to break a filibuster and proceed to a vote on a bill; so, if all the Democrats stick together it would be impossible for the GOP to wage a successful filibuster. However, the Democrats cannot really depend on 60 firm votes. First, Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV) has been recuperating from a debilitating staph infection, and Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA) is battling a malignant brain tumor. This brings the number down to 58; however, I would suspect that on major legislation threatened with a filibuster (e.g., health reform) both Senators would find a way to cast their votes. Second, the Democrats do not march lockstep on a number of key issues, including health, labor and energy legislation. In addition, at times, Senators Ben Nelson (D-NE), Mary Landrieu (D-LA), Blanche Lincoln (D-AR), and Arlen Specter (D-PA) have broken with party discipline. Therefore, the magic can be elusive. However, politically speaking, the 60-vote majority places immense pressure on Congressional Democrats, in both Houses of Congress, to deliver the legislative goods. If they fail to do so, the voters may have something to say about it in 17 months.

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