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On May 3, Spokane, Washington City Council Overwhelmingly Defeated "Do Not Mail" - Postmaster Karen Fairlee Testifies Against It

Postal Populism Amid Governmental Distrust

On Capitol Hill, NAPUS has been publicizing polling data that demonstrates two fundamental realities regarding the Postal Service. First, despite significant mistrust of the government, the American public continues to have confidence in the services that the Postal Service provides. Second, despite a steady drumbeat from Postal Headquarters to close or consolidate Post Offices, an overwhelming majority of the American public continues to strongly oppose closures and consolidations. The combination of these two factors should give pause to those elected and unelected officials who resist providing necessary financial relief to the Postal Service, and those who seek to dismantle the Postal Service's foundations stones – its Post Offices.

In late April, the *Pew Research Center for People and the Press* released an informative, yet somber survey entitled, "Distrust, Discontent, Anger and Partisan Rancor: The People and Their Government." The study reports, "By almost every conceivable measure Americans are less positive and more critical of government..." The survey further finds "a perfect storm of conditions associated with distrust of government"; only 22% of the American public say they can trust the government. Paradoxically, Americans awarded the Postal Service an 83% favorable rating. You have to dig deep into Section 5 of the Pew survey to uncover some extraordinary findings about postal services. 55% of Americans who are "angry" with the government rated Postal job performance "excellent" or "good"; 71% of Americans who are "frustrated" with the government rated the agency's job performance "excellent" or "good", and 84% of Americans who are "content" with the government rated the performance "excellent" or "good." In all three categories, Postal job performance ranked number one among all Federal agencies.

Concurrent with the Pew survey, the Gallup Organization polled the American public regarding postal cost-cutting options in light of the Postal Service's legislative strategies to deal with its financial condition. Among the menu of policy options polled by Gallup, closing Post Office ranked dead last; 86% of Americans oppose this penny-foolish and pound-foolish proposal. A recent *Washington Post-ABC News* poll reached the same conclusion. The level of opposition to Post Office closings has remained stable over the past 12 months, despite Postal rhetoric promoting alternative postal access points, to replace for Post Offices. Americans are not fooled by Postal rhetoric that retail customers do not know the difference between a Post Office and a postal wannabe.

The surveys have implications for Congress. Should the USPS – the highest rated government agency – implode due to inaction or cause Post Office closures, the American public may very well lay blame on the Capitol steps.



Sen. Ron Wyden
(D-OR)

Sen. Ron Wyden Introduces "Vote-By-Mail" Legislation

On May 4, Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR) introduced two bills to advance vote-by-mail in federal elections. S. 3299, the Universal Right to Vote by Mail Act, would enable any voter who requests any absentee ballot to receive one, and would prohibit states from erecting regulatory obstacles that interfere with absentee voting. Upon introducing the bill, Sen. Wyden noted NAPUS' strong support of the legislation in his official statement. S. 3299 is similar to H.R. 1604, which Rep. Susan Davis (D-CA) introduced and is awaiting full House action. Sen. Wyden also introduced S. 3300, the Vote by Mail Act, legislation to provide grants to states and localities that wish to transition to vote by mail elections.

On May 5, the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration conducted a hearing on vote-by-mail. The Committee, chaired by Sen. Charles Schumer (D-NY) heard from both Sen. Wyden and Rep. Davis. In addition, testimony was provided by the Oregon Secretary of State, the Executive Director of the Washington, DC Board of Elections and Ethics, and a representative of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), a right-leaning Washington-based think-tank. With the exception of the AEI, all the other witnesses attested to the success of vote-by-mail and no-excuse absentee ballots. They indicated that a growing number of Americans are casting that ballot prior to election day, and that vote-by-mail boosts voter participation in elections and saves money. Rep. Davis noted the high trust that Americans place in the Postal Service in transporting election ballots. She also specifically referenced the Pew Study mentioned in the previous article. The AEI witness attempted to raise the specter of voter fraud and electoral intimidation. However, under questioning by Chairman Schumer, the AEI representative could not point to a single episode of fraudulent activity in contests conducted by mail.

Postal Regulatory Commission Chairman Ruth Goldway submitted a letter to Chairman Schumer, referencing her testimony before the House Administration Committee. In her testimony, Goldway strongly advocated for vote-by-mail.

Van Hollen Bill Would Extend FEHBP Coverage to 26 Year Olds in 2010

On May 4, Rep. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) introduced legislation, the FEHBP Dependent Coverage Extension Act (H.R. 5200). The bill would enable children of FEHBP enrollees to remain under their parents' policy through their 26th birthday. NAPUS strongly supports this measure.

Consistent with the new health care law (PL 111-148), the Office of Personnel Management instructed FEHBP plans to expand health coverage to dependents through age 26, effective on January 1, 2011. OPM included the requirement in its "Carrier Letter" to all FEHBP plans. However, dependents that turn 22 between now and the end of the year, and those currently over the age of 22 would not be covered until January. In response to this gap, H.R. 5200 would provide a health care safety net for those dependents. A number of health plans in the private non-group market are covering 22-26 year old dependents prior than required in the new law.

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