

2010 NAPUS Legislative Agenda

NAPUS' 2010 "legislative agenda" provides a broad framework for our legislative activities and priorities for the year. It is important to recognize that Congressional reports and political posturing can impact the status of items on the agenda. So, over the course of the 2010, the emphasis on a particular issue may change and, inevitably, new issues will emerge. For this reason, it is essential that Postmasters monitor the eNAPUS Legislative and Political Bulletin on a regular basis, be attentive to communications from NAPUS Headquarters, and keep in touch with your Chapter Legislative Chair.

Ensuring America Is Provided the Postal Service to Which It is Entitled

The most important issue confronting Postmasters and all postal employees is the sustainability of the U.S. Postal Service. Without a viable Postal Service, there are no Postmasters, and there is no universal mail service. As a result of deep economic downturn, which depressed the retail, financial services and real estate industries, mail volume and the associated revenue has eroded to a critical levels. In addition, a significant number of postal customers are choosing to transact business digitally, rather than through the Postal Service. Nevertheless, Americans still value their Post Office and the service that it provides. Americans rank the Postal Service the most trusted government agency for five years in a row. In addition, the number of postal customer who visited their Post Office more than seven times a month doubled between 2007 and 2008. Consequently, NAPUS is committed to fighting for legislation that will ensure an economically viable and universally accessible Postal Service.

In April, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) will release a long awaited evaluation of the Postal Service's current business model, and make recommendations for revising that model. It is expected that Congress will conduct oversight hearings at that time, focusing on the GAO Report. NAPUS will be participating in that review, and will be calibrating our agenda to address GAO's recommendations.

One of the reasons underlying pressures to curtail service and squeeze Post Office staffing levels are unfairly inflated pension and retiree health obligations. In past Congresses, NAPUS has won provisions that the USPS consult with local management over staffing levels, and secured Postal responses at congressional hearings establishing timetables for filling Postmaster vacancies, the fiscal position of the Postal Service requires us to redouble our efforts to ensure adequate staffing. In September 2009, Congress recognized the excessive retiree health burden, by enacting NAPUS-promoted legislation, providing one year of financial relief; however, this is a mere band-aid. Recently, the Postal Service's Office of Inspector General concluded that the Postal Service is projected to overfund its pension obligations by \$75 billion. Moreover, the Inspector General and the Postal Regulatory Commission now estimate that the Postal Service is overpaying its retiree health obligations by \$2.1 billion to \$3.8 billion. One of stumbling blocks to securing corrective legislation is that the Postal relief has become ensnared in the Budget process and is used as a "cash-cow," despite that fact that the Postal Service is "off-budget" and does not rely on taxpayers' dollars.

- NAPUS urges Congress to enact legislation that will accurately calculate Postal pension and retiree health payments.
- NAPUS urges Congress to disengage Postal relief legislation from the Budget process.

The Postal Service is denied the opportunity to offer innovative and customer-desired products and services, as the result of an overly-restrictive definition of “postal products” within current law. Foreign postal authorities and forwarding-thinking postal analysts strongly believe that there are significant opportunities for the postal agencies to offset falling mail volume with non-traditional postal products and partnering with local governments. In addition, NAPUS believes that Vote-By-Mail and no-excuse absentee balloting offer an opportunity for the Postal Service to provide a secure, convenient and reliable means for Americans to exercise their right to vote.

- NAPUS urges Congress to enact legislation to expand the definition of postal products and services.
- NAPUS urges Congress to enact H.R. 1604, legislation to provide for no excuse absentee ballots in federal elections.

The Postal Service has increased its misuse of “temporary emergency suspensions” as a means to circumvent the law requiring community input in the Post Office discontinuance process. Small and rural Post Offices are the bedrock of countless communities and provide essential commerce. NAPUS has spearheaded efforts before the Postal Regulatory Commission to ensure that small and rural Post Offices are protected.

- NAPUS opposes legislation to that would deny communities their appeals rights or removes the statutory requirement that a Post Office cannot be closed solely for financial reasons.

Defending Postmaster Retirement Benefits and Health Equity

NAPUS supports legislation to restore and protect equity and fairness to postal retirees and their dependents. Over the years Congress and the White House have attempted to carve away, or overlooked the financial and health security of active and retired Postmasters. Postmaster Social Security annuities, Medicare coverage and Federal health benefits have all been at risk or victimized.

Under current law, during years in which there is no Social Security COLA, Medicare Part B premiums are frozen for Social Security recipients; however, the protection is not afforded to Civil Service Retirement System annuitants. In 2010, Medicare Part B premiums would increase \$13.60 per month for CSRS annuitants. In September, the House passed HR 3631, which provided for equitable treatment for all Medicare Part B beneficiaries.

- NAPUS urges the Senate to pass H.R. 3631, the Medicare Premium Fairness Act

The Government Pension Offset (GPO) and Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) can reduce or eliminate Social Security benefits for CSRS annuitants who otherwise would be eligible for full Social Security benefits or survivor benefits. These provisions are unfair to CSRS annuitants.

- NAPUS supports HR 235 and S 484, legislation to eliminate the GPO and the WEP

Over the past year, Congress has been attempting to craft comprehensive legislation to reform the health insurance industry to provide health coverage to the approximately 30 million Americans who cannot afford basic health insurance, and to reduce the escalating cost of health care. In its quest to cobble together legislation, the Senate included a number of provisions that could have been harmful to Postmasters. First, it assigned the administrative responsibility for a government-wide health plan to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the agency responsible for

managing the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program. Second, the legislation would have levied an excise tax on FEHBP plans, which could have resulted in reduced benefits. Fortunately, the final product, as promoted by Postmaster allies in the House of Representatives ensured that the legislation would not adversely impact OPM's ability to administer FEHBP, and created a safe-harbor for FEHBP, in terms of a prospective tax. The results of the Massachusetts special election has moth-balled the health insurance bill for now. However, Congress may attempt to craft a more modest approach, prior to November. If Congress proceeds with a revised health care bill:

- NAPUS supports a sturdy firewall, protecting the FEHBP from a government-wide program for non-federal and non-postal populations
- NAPUS opposes an excise tax levy against FEHBP plans