



CONGRESS TAKES AIM AT THE POSTAL SERVICE

USPS Financial Issues Remain At Top Of Legislative Agenda

The 112th Congress has been a bitter disappointment to most Americans, with the legislative body's approval ratings at historic lows. Less than 10% of Americans in recent surveys believe that Congress is properly doing its job.

The many legislative issues revolving around the Postal Service and its employees are a microcosm of this larger problem. Notwithstanding overwhelming support for the Postal Service from the American people, and significant support from Members of Congress for what should be non-controversial fixes to the Postal Service's current financial woes, Congress is proving once again that it can accomplish almost nothing.

House Committee Passes Anti-Union, Anti-USPS Bill

In a display of partisan ideology over practical solutions, the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee passed H.R. 2309 on October 13. The bill is designed to minimize and eventually privatize the Postal Service, and make it into a non-union entity.

Written by Committee Chairman Darryl Issa (R-CA), the bill contains provisions that would force senior employees to retire or be laid off using reduction in force rules, gut existing collective bargaining agreements and make future bargaining inconsequential, reduce delivery to five days, and eliminate both home delivery (replaced by cluster boxes) and Congressional or community input on closings of postal facilities. Issa's aim is to reduce employee wages and benefits in order to "save" the USPS. His bill was supported by the USPS legislative representatives, who are using this bill as a vehicle for attacking the wages and benefits earned by postal employees.

"This is a textbook example of bad legislation. Issa and the Republicans are trying to destroy collective bargaining for postal unions," said National President John F. Hegarty. "Mr. Issa is mimicking the Republican-led state legislatures, like those in Wisconsin and Ohio, which have been attacking public employees' collective bargaining rights in an attempt to eliminate the employees' pensions, their health care, and ultimately their unions."

There is no doubt that Issa rigidly adheres to a right-wing, partisan ideology, which aims to decrease the size of government by strangling the Postal Service. Rather than creating jobs, which the nation needs, Issa sees his role as putting

more than 100,000 postal workers out of a job. Indeed, Issa has made clear that ultimately he wants to reduce the USPS by more than 200,000 employees.

One year ago, Congressman Issa told postal union representatives that he would not attack collective bargaining. Yet, with this bill, he is leading the assault on free collective bargaining for postal employees. Indications are that the Postal Service provided him with the language and talking points that he wanted.

All of the Democrats on the Committee voted "no" on these anti-labor provisions and against the entire bill. Several Republicans on the panel expressed some displeasure at the blatant anti-union and anti-democratic provisions included in the bill. Only one Republican on the Committee, however — Todd Platts (R-PA) — voted against the bill.

The next step for H.R. 2309 is for the bill to go to the House Rules Committee, where it most likely will be rubber-stamped, and then go to the House Floor for a final vote. Such action may take place before Thanksgiving.

Following the House Committee's final action in October, Senator Tom Carper (D-DE) issued a statement in which he said that the Issa bill was an exercise in partisanship that would not pass the Senate. At least on this issue, someone of responsibility has said absolutely not.

Reform of the Federal Employees Compensation Act

Congressman Issa also has tried to gut the workers compensation program covering postal employees under the Federal Employees Compensation Act. On this issue, however, Issa and his fellow Republican ideologues ran into a procedural hurdle.

In particular, several Members forced the Issa Committee to acknowledge that it did not have jurisdiction over the OWCP program, and therefore could not address the comprehensive changes proposed by Issa.

Meanwhile, earlier this year in the Senate, Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) introduced a FECA reform bill. Her bill, the Federal Workers' Compensation Reform Act of 2011, would require a "transition" to regular CSRS or FERS retirement systems for federal and postal employees who receive FECA benefits as a result of workplace injuries after they reach their retirement age under Social Security.

Collins argues that workers who have been permanently disabled by their injuries and who will never return to work should not be covered