



MAIL HANDLER UPDATE

NATIONAL POSTAL MAIL HANDLERS UNION

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS: 1101 Connecticut Avenue, N.W. • Suite 500 • Washington, D.C. 20036 (202) 833-9095



John F. Hegarty
National President

CONGRESS RENEWS FOCUS ON POSTAL REFORM MEASURES

NPMHU CALLS FOR ACTION BY UNION'S LEGISLATIVE ACTIVISTS



Mark A. Gardner
Secretary-Treasurer

As the Congressional summer recess approaches, both the Senate and the House of Representatives are starting to pay more attention to the issues facing the Postal Service and to competing versions of postal reform legislation. Now is the time for mail handlers to get involved by contacting their Members of Congress and urging support for many, but opposition to some of the draft proposals.

During its biennial Legislative Conference in May 2013, the NPMHU urged Congress to pass the Postal Service Protection Act of 2013, S. 316 and H.R. 630. These identical bills—introduced by Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-OR)—now have 28 co-sponsors in the Senate, and 165 bi-partisan co-sponsors in the House. If adopted, these bills would end the pre-funding mandate of the Retiree Health Benefit Fund (RHBF), which now requires the USPS to make 75 years of retiree healthcare benefit payments over a 10-year period, a burden no other government agency or private company is forced to bear; allow USPS to recover over-payments it previously has made to the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) and the Federal Employee Retirement System (FERS); re-establish overnight delivery standards for first-class mail, which would help keep mail processing facilities open; protect six-day delivery; permit the USPS to develop innovative products and services, such as issuing licenses, ending the prohibition on beer and wine shipments, and providing notary services; and ensure another level of protection for rural post offices. Also endorsed by the NPMHU is H.R. 961, sponsored by Congressman Stephen F. Lynch (D-MA), which would adjust the formula for calculating FERS overpayments and allow the USPS use of those overpayments. H.R. 961 has 131 co-sponsors in the House.

In the last few weeks, new drafts have been issued for two postal reform bills—one from Representative Darryl Issa (R-CA), who chairs the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, and the other from Rep-

resentative Elijah Cummings (D-MD), who serves as the Ranking Minority Member on that important House Committee.

For the most part, the Issa discussion draft serves as a re-introduction of many of the failed provisions of H.R. 2039 from the prior 111th Congress, a bill—also drafted by Congressman Issa—that never reached the House floor because it tried to solve the Postal Service's financial problems by cutting customer service. The cuts that Issa is still proposing in his discussion draft include eliminating Saturday letter mail delivery and cutting door delivery. The Issa bill also would reject no-layoff clauses included in any National Agreement; cut employee fringe benefits, including workers compensation; and amend the collective bargaining process by changing the definition of compensation and requiring last-best-final-offer negotiations to govern arbitration. And the bill would establish a Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority, which would replace the USPS Board of Governors until the USPS has a budget surplus for two consecutive years and, during that time, have the authority to close mail processing facilities, reduce service standards, and otherwise dismantle the Postal Service.

Cummings' draft bill is considerably more favorable, as it would give the Postal Service access to its CSRS and FERS overpayments; revise the RHBF funding requirement to 80% over the next 40 years; create a Chief Innovation Officer, who could focus on a wider scope of non-postal services; and allow for greater early-retirement incentives and enhanced reporting on any additional closures of mail processing facilities.

In the next few weeks, the NPMHU National Office will be writing directly to its Local Union officers and its legislative activists with a request to use the summer recess as an opportunity to address these issues with all Congressional representatives while they are back home in August. Please watch your mail for further information.

MARRIAGE-BASED BENEFITS EXTENDED TO SAME-SEX SPOUSES

On June 26, 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) is unconstitutional. That statutory section previously defined marriage as limited to one man and one woman, and prohibited recognition of same-sex spouses for purposes of federal benefits.

As a result of this ruling, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the Postal Service have extended marriage-based benefit programs to federal and postal employees, annuitants, and

their same-sex spouses who have legally married in a jurisdiction that permits same-sex marriages. Such benefits are available irrespective of where the employee currently lives or works. Moreover, this change in policy has been deemed to be a qualifying life event, so employees and annuitants are allowed to change their benefits through August 26, 2013, which is sixty days after the court decision.

Under the authority of OPM, this change applies to health insurance, vision and dental pro-

grams, long-term care insurance, life insurance, and retirement programs. Within the Postal Service, this change also affects flexible spending accounts, relocation benefits, FMLA leave (pending further clarification from the Department of Labor), and other leave programs such as sick leave for dependent care, bereavement leave, and leave sharing. For those mail handlers potentially affected by these changes, more information is available on PostalEase or the NPMHU website.

WELCOME TO ALL MAIL HANDLER ASSISTANTS!

Since early April, more than 4,500 Mail Handler Assistants have been hired by the Postal Service into the NPMHU bargaining unit. Early reports indicate that an extremely large percentage of these new postal employees have joined the NPMHU, and the NPMHU welcomes each and every MHA to the Postal Service and to the Union.

Under the 2011 National Agreement, the terms of which were determined by the Fishgold Arbitration Award, newly hired MHAs will be the only source for future career hiring within the mail handler craft. MHAs are hired for terms of 360 calendar days, at wage rates that are set by contract and will be increased each year, in November 2013 (by 2%), in November 2014 (by

2.5%), and in November 2015 (by 2.5%). MHAs also earn night shift differential; time and one-half for all overtime work; annual leave; and relative standing based on their date of hire. MHAs also have access to the grievance and arbitration procedure, so if an MHA is having a dispute with management, is called into a meeting with supervisors or management that may lead to discipline, or actually is the subject of discipline, it is imperative that the MHA contact his or her shop steward immediately. And, of course, shop stewards and other NPMHU representatives always are available to answer questions or discuss other work-related matters.

Thank you for your service, and welcome to the NPMHU.

Please Post!!

July 2013