



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



Mark A. Gardner
Secretary-Treasurer

THE 2014 MID-TERM ELECTIONS: MORE CHANGES, MORE UNCERTAINTY

The national elections of 2014 are now part of political history, but what do the upcoming, dramatic changes in Congress mean for the NPMHU and its membership?

Even as this Update is being printed, the lame duck session of the 113th Congress is meeting for its final session in Washington, DC, and almost no one knows what will happen in the next two weeks. So how can anyone accurately predict what will happen over the next two years, during the 114th Congress in 2015 and 2016? The only certainty is continuing uncertainty, with both Houses of Congress under Republican control, while the Obama Administration works through its last two years running the Executive Branch.

More than usual, it remains dangerous to predict legislative and political outcomes, but there are some changes that will occur immediately when the new 114th Congress convenes during the first week of January 2015:

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The House remains in Republican control, but the Republican majority has greatly expanded. From the very top, where John Boehner (R-OH) will continue as Speaker, not much is likely to change. But the chairs of the key committees and subcommittees affecting Mail Handlers and other postal employees are likely to change, and the minority Democrats will have fewer panel members on each committee and reduced staff.

Having served out his term-limited position as Chair of the full House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, Rep. Darryl Issa (R-CA) will step into the background, and Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-UT) will take over the chairmanship of this committee through which nearly all postal legislation must pass. He will be serving only his fourth term in Congress, and will be one of the youngest and more dynamic committee chairs.

Chaffetz' official biography has this to say about the Utah Republican: "Believing in the core conservative principles of a strong national defense,

fiscal discipline, limited government, and accountability, Mr. Chaffetz distinguished himself as a budget hawk by co-founding the Sunset Caucus, identifying budget cutting measures, running a lean office that returned more than \$600,000 of his office budget in his first term, and sleeping on a cot in the closet of his office." He also has a competitive side, having been the starting placekicker on the Brigham Young University football team while in college.

On issues before the oversight committee, Chaffetz is expected to be less confrontational than his predecessor, focusing on more mundane issues like embassy security, fixing the Secret Service, and reforming the Postal Service (assuming such reform does not pass Congress during the remainder of 2014). Upon Chaffetz' selection as the chair, NPMHU National President Hegarty expressed optimism about the new committee leadership, noting that "the success of the Postal Service should not be a partisan or a political issue," and all sides should be able to agree on "protecting USPS service standards, the mail processing network, and six-day delivery," while ensuring that "the Postal Service remains solvent without taxpayer subsidies or unnecessary financial interference from Congress."

On the Democratic side of the House committee, Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-MD) is expected to remain as ranking minority member. Interestingly, Reps. Chaffetz and Cummings have managed to form a personal bond, having made widely-reported visits to each other's congressional districts (in Baltimore, Maryland and in Provo, Utah) during the past few years.

Both Chaffetz and Cummings previously have taken an active interest in the Postal Service, introducing legislation, attending hearings, and making comments about the need for change. Both are aware of the financial issues facing the USPS.

Other issues of interest to Mail Handlers also may fall under the new chairman's radar.

Chaffetz has continuously sought to reduce the size of government and the federal deficit. What reductions, if any, may be aimed at programs such as health care and retirement benefits of postal and federal employees is unclear, although the NPMHU has

consistently opposed any cuts in these programs and strongly believes that collective bargaining between the NPMHU and the USPS, not Congress, should control these matters.

SENATE

Substantial changes also are expected on the Senate side, as Republicans took control over a majority of the upper chamber during the recent elections.

In January 2015, Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI) is slated to take over as chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, which oversees the federal workforce and the entire Postal Service. Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE), who has chaired the committee for the past two years, is expected to remain on the panel as ranking minority member.

Johnson is largely an unknown quantity on USPS issues, and his prior statements present a decidedly mixed approach, at best. At times in the past, Sen. Johnson has said that the Postal Service should be allowed or encouraged to go through a bankruptcy process which would result in a downsized, private corporation that would lose the benefits of governmental oversight and regulation. Such a process might also allow the revised entity – that is, the Postal Service – to terminate or substantially modify its contracts, including its collective bargaining agreements with the NPMHU and the other postal unions.

More recently, Sen. Johnson has claimed that he will oversee the Committee by searching for "common ground" with his colleagues, including those on the Democratic side of the aisle. He also has acknowledged that there are constitutional issues with his stance on bankruptcy for the Postal Service, and it has been reported elsewhere that Johnson has said that legislation incorporating his ideas is unlikely to pass.

As the NPMHU often says, elections have consequences. The messages to be taken from the 2014 mid-term elections are far from clear, but certainly the Postal Service and its employees will remain targets of congressional oversight and legislative action.

One thing is certain, however: the NPMHU will be working hard on Capitol Hill to eliminate or minimize any negative impact from the 2014 election cycle, all the while planning for the next political campaign in 2016.

"...the chairs of the key committees and subcommittees affecting Mail Handlers and other postal employees are likely to change..."

Happy Holidays

Please Post!!

December 2014

