**The NPMHU Legislative Agenda for the 117th Congress**

**Update**

**Background**

For almost fifteen years, the National Postal Mail Handlers Union has faced the financial ramifications of the 2006 Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act (P.L. 109-435). Though this law’s intention was to modernize the Postal Service, provisions within it were unable to overcome the decrease of first-class mail volume and the mandate to prefund retiree healthcare benefits created a severe financial burden. This prefunding mandate is responsible for the majority of financial losses for the Postal Service within the last decade, which is used to fuel privatization arguments. Realizing the hinderance this caused, Members of Congress worked on legislation that would repeal this mandate and provide fiscal stability for the Postal Service. What resulted was the NPMHU-endorsed Postal Service Reform Act (PSRA) of 2022. The bill received strong bipartisan support in both the House and the Senate, passing 342-92 and 79-19 a month apart. The NPMHU, along with the other postal unions and stakeholders, worked on this legislation for years in order to obtain consensus. While the legislation moves toward righting the Postal Service’s fiscal ship, there is still much work to be done.

Moving forward in the 117th Congress, NPMHU’s legislative agenda will focus on continuing to improve the Postal Service’s finances, protecting service standards for customers, defending earned retirement and healthcare benefits, promoting workers’ rights, and strengthening American elections.

**Improving the United States Postal Service**

While the PSRA gained wide bipartisan support and passed in both the House and Senate, it only provides the first steps in improving the Postal Service.

The NPMHU will continue to work with members of the House and Senate to draft bipartisan legislation that further enforces sustainability and protects the workforce. These measures should include:

* Provide for certain index fund investments for the Retiree Health Benefits Fund, rather than restricting the Fund to low-yielding Treasury bonds.
  + The Postal Service Financial Improvement Act (H.R. 2553) as introduced in the 116th Congress addressed this issue.
* Utilize postal-only assumptions for calculating pension liabilities.
  + The USPS Office of Inspector General reported in 2013 that this recalculation would reduce liabilities with the Civil Service Retirement System by $1.3 billion while the Federal Employees Retirement System would see a reduction of $9.5 billion in liabilities.
* Nonpostal services to grow revenue.
  + The USPS Shipping Equity Act (H.R. 3287/S. 1663) as introduced calls to allow the shipment of alcoholic beverages directly between licensed producer and retailers to the consumer. The USPS estimated this would generate over $50 million annually.
  + Currently, the USPS has the authority to expand nonbanking financial services, providing ATMs, check cashing, bill pay, and expanded wire transfers and money orders. In a 2015 report from the USPS Office of the Inspector General, after a 5-year ramp-up, these expansions could generate $1 billion annually.
* Utilize market-dominate rates.
  + The Postal Regulatory Commission should instate 50% of the exigency surcharge rate that was utilized though April 2016; this language was included in 2019 postal reform draft language.

**Strengthening Service Standards**

Within the first months of his appointment, Postmaster General Louis DeJoy developed a ten-year plan, Delivering for America, in an attempt to set a path of financial stability and modernization. Within the plan, the delivery window is expanded from 2-3 days to 2-5 days, relying on surface transportation over air, as well as restructuring the overall network. It is NPMHU’s concern that these changes do nothing but drive away customers, negatively impact services, and undermine the work of dedicated employees. The NPMHU asks lawmakers to work with us to fight against closures, consolidations, and subcontracting brought on by this “plan.”

**Fundamentals of the Postal Service**

Members of Congress should continue to protect the basic fundamentals of the Postal Service, ensuring that every American household and business, in urban, suburban, and rural areas, has access to the universal service provided by the USPS. The NPMHU endorses resolutions introduced by Members of the House and Senate that express the need to ensure that the Postal Service remains a public entity that can ensure delivery.

* Expressing the sense that Congress should take all appropriate measures to ensure that the Postal Service remains an independent establishment of the Federal Government and is not subject to privatization, as seen in H.Res. 47.
* Expressing the sense that the Postal Service should take all appropriate measures to ensure the continuation of door delivery for all business and residential customers, as seen in H.Res. 109.

**Protecting Earned Retirement and Healthcare Benefits**

Unfortunately, it has become common practice to utilize earned retirement and healthcare benefits of postal and federal employees as a means to reduce the deficit. As the nation takes on greater debt in order to respond to the economic recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the NPMHU is concerned that the House and Senate will again consider these cuts and will lobby against the following:

* Moving from a high-3 to a high-5 for annuity calculations;
* Eliminating FERS Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) and reducing CSRS COLAs by 0.5%;
* Eliminating the FERS retirement supplement plan for those who retire before the age of 62;
* Reducing the G-Fund interest rates for those under the Thrift Savings Plan; and,
* Increasing employee retirement and healthcare contributions.

In addition to protecting these benefits, the NPMHU will work with lawmakers to strengthen retirement benefits. These measures include:

* The elimination or curtailing of the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP).
  + Rep. Rodney Davis (R-IL) and Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) introduced the Social Security Fairness Act (H.R. 82/S. 1302), which calls to repeal both GPO and WEP.
  + Rep. Kevin Brady (R-TX-08) introduced the Equal Treatment of Public Servants Act (H.R. 5834), providing for a $100 rebate to those first eligible for WEP benefits before 2022; those impacted by WEP who are eligible for benefits between 2022-2060 would be subject either to a new formula or the current WEP formula, whichever is more beneficial; and those eligible for benefits in 2061 would be subject to a new formula.
  + Rep. Richie Neal (D-MA-01) introduced the Public Servants Protection and Fairness Act (H.R. 2337), which recalculates Social Security benefits for public workers to ensure they get are not negatively impacted by the Windfall Elimination Provision
* Providing temporary employees hired after January 1989 with the opportunity to make additional contributions to their retirement plans, allowing eligible employees to retire on time with full retirement benefits.
  + Rep. Derek Kilmer (D-WA) introduced the Federal Retirement Fairness Act (H.R. 4268) to address this issue.

**Promoting Workers’ Rights**

The beginning of the 117th Congress saw positive steps forward in basic workers’ rights. The House of Representatives passed the PRO (Protecting the Right to Organize) Act , H.R. 842, which would strengthen current federal laws by allowing private-sector workers to organize and join a union and bargain for better wages and benefits. Identical legislation was introduced in the Senate, S. 420. Additionally, the House and Senate introduced the Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act (H.R. 5727), requiring public employers to recognize employees’ rights to join a union and collectively bargain over wages, hours, working conditions, and allowing workers to access arbitration and mediation as a means of dispute resolution. The NPMHU will continue to advocate for these bills.

Despite the growth of production over the past years, American wages continue to fall behind and the federal minimum wage remains outpaced by inflation. In the 116th Congress, the Raise the Wage Act (H.R. 603/S. 53) called to increase federal minimum wage to $15.00 an hour by 2025, with gradual increases over a five-year period. Similar legislation passed the House in the 116th Congress, and the NPMHU will continue to push this issue.

The NPMHU will also work with our brothers and sisters in LiUNA to protect prevailing wage laws, especially those under the Service Contract Act.

**Strengthen American Elections**

During the 2020 elections, there was unprecedented reliance on the Postal Service for the processing and delivery of mail-in ballots. In the November 2020 general election, the Postal Service handled 135 million ballots, 610 million pieces of election mail, and an additional 4 billion pieces of political mail. The Postal Service delivered 97.9% of ballots within 3 days and 99.7% of ballots within 5 days. In order for this success to occur, constant communication between USPS, postal unions and management associations, and state and local election boards was necessary. With this success, more voters are expected to rely on vote-by-mail, and more local and state governments are examining how to expand voters’ access to mail in ballots. The NPMHU will promote legislation, primarily at the state and local level, to encourage democratic participation through vote by mail initiatives, and will support such efforts at the federal level as well.

The NPMHU will take all reasonable steps to ensure that mail handlers and their families are actively involved in upcoming elections, through voter registration and education efforts to increase turn-out. It is critical that all Mail Handlers and their families not only are registered to vote, but that they go to the polls to have their voices heard. We must continue to work to ensure that pro-union, pro-worker candidates are elected to represent our interests.