

MAIL HANDLERS PUSH TO PROTECT EARNED BENEFITS

Katie Maddocks, Legislative and Political Director



In my first article of 2023, I noted the unprecedented fifteen rounds of voting to elect Kevin McCarthy (R-CA-20) as Speaker of the House. What happened in October on the floor of the House of Representatives was even stranger. House Republicans voted to oust Speaker McCarthy and the position was vacant for over fifteen days. During these fifteen days, no votes could take place – creating a log jam of legislation. Between October 17th and the 25th, there were a slew of Members of Congress bidding for the position, failed votes, and several jabs made at the expense of the situation, before Mike Johnson (R-LA-04) was voted into the position. At the time, he was not a household name. Currently in his fourth term within the U.S. House of Representatives, he previously served as the Chair of the House Republican Study Committee, which often examines how House Republicans can reduce spending and limit the role of the federal government.

Speaker Johnson's first task in his new position was to broker a deal that would keep the federal government open past the previously agreed to deadline of November 17. Back and forth conversations included reductions to federal agencies, cuts to entitlement programs, funding for aid to Ukraine and Israel. What resulted is being called a tiered CR. First: a CR is a continuous resolution which allows for spending levels to remain stagnant. The tiered part of it applies to the fact that funding for some federal agencies ends in January, while others' funding will end in February.

This will mean that Americans will see a fight over federal spending levels four times within six months.

One issue that has already surfaced in connection with this fight over federal spending is the potential creation of a fiscal commission to examine federal spending and how to reduce it. The bipartisan Problem Solvers Caucus earlier this fall called for a fiscal commission, and Reps. Bill Huizenga (R-MI-04) and Scott Peters (D-CA-50) introduced the Fiscal Commission Act of 2023, H.R. 5779. This bipartisan legislation proposes looking at how entitlement programs can be reduced as a means to save money. The intention of the legislation is to examine the nation's debt and provide thought out recommendations to reduce federal spending.

Furthermore, the House Budget Committee held a hearing in October on the need for a fiscal commission. In his opening statement, Committee Chairman Jodey Arrington (R-TX-19) commented, "It would be a folly of epic, mind-numbing proportions to ignore our deteriorating fiscal state – this Sword of Damocles hanging over us, poised to trigger a sovereign debt crisis that would jeopardize not only our economy, but our national security, America's leadership in the world, and our very way of life."

During the hearing, former Senator Kent Conrad, who previously served as the Chair of the Senate Budget Committee, testified and invoked past fiscal commissions including the Department of Defense (DOD) Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC)

process in the late 1990s and the Simpson-Bowles Commission from 2010. Though Senator Conrad commented on the savings generated by the BRAC process, it is important to note that the last round of BRACs in 2005 projected savings of \$35 billion over 20 years, but only yielded \$10 billion. Additionally, BRACs often impact local economies as the loss of jobs on military bases negatively affects private businesses in the area. The Simpson-Bowles Commission under the Obama Administration had high aspirations to cut spending, but the only results were a three-year pay freeze for our brothers and sisters under the General Schedule pay system, and increased employee contributions of 3.1% to retirement benefits for postal and federal employees hired after 2013, and a 4.4% increase for those hired after 2014. The NPMHU consistently argues the source of the national deficit is not due to dedicated postal employees' earned benefits, and they should not be targeted as the solution.

It's not all doom and gloom on Capital Hill. Through our advocacy, the NPMHU has seen the reintroduction of legislation that many of you have been asking about, the Federal Retirement Fairness Act, H.R. 5995. The legislation, as introduced by Reps. Derek Kilmer (D-WA-06) and Don Bacon (R-NE-02), addresses inequity within the Employee Retirement System.

As many Mail Handlers know, those in the postal workforce who started their careers after January 1989 as temporary employees are unable to make contributions to their Federal



Legislative and Political Director Katie Maddocks joined members from Local 307 to walk the picket line with striking United Auto Workers. Pictured in red NPMHU shirts along with UAW members are (l-r) Legislative and Political Director Katie Maddocks, Local 307 Recording Secretary Ursula Patterson and Local 307 Member Derek Douglass.

Employee Retirement System (FERS) benefits until they became full-time, career employees. Often, these dedicated men and women find as they approach retirement, that their time as a non-career employee does not apply toward their retirement and they are forced to choose between either working longer in their careers than they expected, or retiring early without their full, expected benefits.

The legislation would allow those who started their careers in the federal and postal workforces as temporary employees to make additional contributions to their retirement in order to retire on time with the benefits they would have if they had started out as full time, career employees. The bill is already garnering strong support on both sides of the aisle.

The Senate has been productive with ushering through nominees to the Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC). The Senate unanimously approved of Thomas Day to the PRC. Commissioner

Day previously served as Senior Vice President of Government Relations and Chief Sustainability Officer with the United States Postal Service. Robert Taub, who was in his third term and previously served as Commission Chairman, was reappointed unanimously by the Senate. Before serving on the PRC, Commissioner Taub worked for Representative John McHugh as chief of staff while the Congressman served on the house Oversight and Reform Committee where he worked on service issues. Additionally, he worked for the U.S. Government Accountability Office which provides oversight to Congress. The Mail Handlers Union looks forward to our continued work with Commissioner Taub.

The NPMHU needs to ensure our friends and champions remain on Capitol Hill so they can continue to advocate for our issues; vote for nominees who will help us; and fight against bad policy ideas. We do this through our political arm, the NPMHU Political

Action Committee (PAC). NPMHU PAC allows us to make financial contributions to federal candidates in a political climate that continues to grow more and more expensive. And as we are about to go into a presidential election year, NPMHU PAC expects the costs of elections to be greater than the last time we voted for a president. In 2020, spending on congressional elections came out to about \$7.25 billion, and in 2022, spending was almost \$9 billion. Over the past five years, NPMHU PAC has steadily been growing — a sign that participants understand the value of political action. Mail Handlers can make a one-time contribution to the PAC with a check, money order, or credit card, or periodically throughout the year with giving through payroll deductions. If you have any questions about how to give to the PAC, or which candidates we give to, please feel free to contact me. Politics is not a spectator sport, and I'm happy to get you more involved.