

NPMHU MEMBERS PREPARE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF PSRA

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To this point, 2022 has been a legislatively active year for the National Postal Mail Handlers Union and the Postal Service. Within three months' time, both the House and Senate voted in favor of the Postal Service Reform Act of 2022 (PSRA), which was followed by President Biden signing the bill into law, officially designating it Public Law 117-108. These actions were more than a decade in the making, and provide the first steps to the Postal Service's financial stability, while promoting best practices in retiree healthcare for employees as well as promoting accountability to customers.

One aspect of the law is Medicare integration for future retirees, and this is what NPMHU members have contacted me about the most. As with any changes that coincide with retirement, many members want to be reassured they will still have access to healthcare in their older years. Active employees under the age of 64 as of January 1, 2025, when both retired and at least age 65, are required to enroll in Medicare, apart from a few exceptions (those enrolled in TRICARE or Indian Health Services, or those living abroad).

Current postal annuitants, and those who retire before January 1, 2025, are not to be forced into Medicare if they do not want it. They will be given a choice. Meanwhile, current annuitants who had opted not to enroll in Medicare when eligible, but have since changed their mind, will be able to do so during the special enrollment period and will not be held to the late enrollment fee. Additionally, active postal employees over the age of 65 can elect to stay in the postal-only FEHBP while employed by USPS.

Current postal employees will be placed in a postal-only risk pool within the FEHBP, called the Postal Service Health Benefits Program. The postal-only plans in FEHBP will be regulated and run in the same way current FEHBP plans are. Major plans now available will still be offered in this postal-only version of FEHBP plans. While the benefits would remain the same, it is expected that the premiums will be significantly reduced because postal participants would be placed in a separate risk pool with new rules related to Medicare enrollment. Around 80% of postal annuitants already enroll in Medicare, and postal employees have contributed over \$34 billion into Medicare since 1983.

It needs to be reiterated: changes are not coming to healthcare for postal employees or retirees for another three years, as the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the Postal Service are working out the regulations to ensure an easy transition for future retirees. OPM and USPS will produce educational materials to ensure that all postal employees and retirees are fully aware of how the new law will impact them, well before the statutory deadlines of January 1, 2025.

Meanwhile, a "frequently asked questions" page is featured on the NPMHU website at <https://www.npmhu.org/legislative/psra-faq>. These FAQs go over common questions regarding Medicare integration and how it can impact current employees and retirees. If there are any further questions or issues needed to be clarified, please feel free to reach out to the National Office.

MOVING LEGISLATIVE AGENDA FORWARD

The NPMHU's legislative work is not done just because postal reform passed. There is still much work to be done to protect our members. Representatives and Senators continue to introduce legislation that supports the benefits of postal employees. For example, the House Education and Labor Committee favorably reported the Improving Access to Workers' Compensation for Injured Federal Workers Act (H.R. 6087). This NPMHU-supported bill would allow postal and federal employees to see nurse practitioners and physicians assistants, in addition to previously covered medical providers, in order to diagnose and treat work-related injuries. As the Postal Service generates one of the largest number of workers' comp injuries, this commonsense legislation would ensure that injured workers will have access to needed care.

Members of Congress also have introduced legislation calling to improve financial gratuities for those who die while on the job. The Honoring Civil Servants Killed in the Line of Duty Act (H.R. 7376) increases death gratuities from \$10,000 to \$100,000 and the funeral allowance from \$800 to \$8,800. Death gratuities have not been increased since 1997, and funeral expenses have not been increased since 1966. Elected officials recognize that the death of postal and

federal workers is devastating enough for their families, and this legislation will ease financial burdens caused by the sudden loss of income.

SENATE APPROVES NEW MEMBERS TO USPS BOARD OF GOVERNORS

On May 12, 2022, the Senate approved by voice votes two of President Biden's nominees for the USPS Board of Governors, Dan Tangherlini and Derek Kan. Governor Tangherlini previously served as the Administrator of the General Services Administration, as the chief financial officer at the Department of Treasury, and as city administrator to the District of Columbia. Governor Kan served both in the Obama and Trump Administrations on the Amtrak Board of Directors, as Under Secretary of Transportation Policy in the Department of Transportation, and as the Deputy Director of the Office of Management and Budget. During the nomination hearing before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, Ranking Member Rob Portman commented, "You will have an important role to make sure the Postal Service is able to successfully implement plans and transition to a financially sustainable future.... I believe that by thoughtfully engaging on these issues and working with stakeholders, committed leaders at the Postal Service can address the challenges and ensure a brighter future for the Postal Service for years to come."

MIDTERM ELECTIONS

The current 117th Congress has made tremendous strides for both the NPMHU and the working class in general. Not only was there strong bipartisan support for the PSRA, and for President Biden's infrastructure legislation, but also many elected officials have been more vocal on labor issues. It has been a perfect storm of well-written legislation and devoted leadership. As we approach the 2022 midterm elections, however, we must be concerned about a change of party control, and must wonder whether the NPMHU would see this same level of support in the next Congress. Because Democrats currently have only a three-seat lead over the Republicans in the House, and the Senate is evenly tied, it is very likely that both chambers of Congress will switch party control in this year's November elections. Historically speaking, the midterm congressional elections during a President's first term of office show large gains for the party recently out of power.

In recent years, moreover, Republicans have targeted the pay and benefits of postal employees as a means to curb the overall federal budget deficit. With the recent pandemic and the passage of significant spending bills over the past two years, NPMHU members can expect to hear constant calls to increase employee contributions to retirement and healthcare plans, as well as proposals to reduce benefits. We

have seen these attacks in the past, and we should expect to see them again. That being said, as we go into this election cycle, it is important that NPMHU members support elected officials from either party who will fight for us. The NPMHU still has a lot on its legislative plate, and it is important that those who advocate for us on Capitol Hill either remain there or be newly voted into office.

To meet these goals, it is getting more and more costly every election cycle. During the recent SAMLU in Louisville, KY, it was predicted that campaign spending during the 2022 elections will total about \$6 billion. To help meet these costs, it is necessary for the NPMHU PAC, the political arm of our union, to continue growing. The NPMHU PAC allows the union to make financial contributions to members of Congress who support Mail Handlers and push the NPMHU agenda in Washington. Over the past year, the PAC has grown by \$11,000, and at the SAMLU, the PAC recognized Local Unions that make significant contributions to this growth: 300, 301, 310, 332, and 333. Thank you to everyone who contributes to the PAC, and promotes its success.

