

UPDATE

THE NPMHU LEGISLATIVE AGENDA FOR THE 116th CONGRESS

Every two years, the Committee on the Future of the National Postal Mail Handlers Union adopts a comprehensive legislative agenda for the new Congress. This year is the first session of the current 116th Congress, which will be in session during 2019 and 2020, and once again a legislative agenda has been developed. Included on this agenda are specific legislative goals, as well as various political matters on which the NPMHU National Office will be working during the next two years.

Before the last Congress, because of the 2016 national elections for Congress and the U.S. President, the political landscape in Washington, DC changed dramatically. President Trump took over the White House, and both Houses of Congress had strong Republican majorities. During the 2018 mid-term elections, the Senate became slightly more Republican, but the House completely changed direction, with the Democratic Party gaining a large majority of the Members, and thereby taking over all committees and re-appointing Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) as Speaker. The political atmosphere is more polarized than ever, however, with opposition to President Trump reaching a fevered pitch, while most Republicans fear criticizing the President no matter what he does or says. The two years covered by the 116th Congress, therefore, are likely to be dominated by anti-worker, anti-union, and anti-USPS rhetoric and proposals that pose serious risks for the NPMHU and all mail handlers.

As always, the NPMHU will continue its fight to protect the legislative interests of all mail handlers and promote deeper involvement of its members in the legislative and political arenas.

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Preserving and Protecting the Future of the Postal Service

This is the primary objective of the NPMHU in the current legislative session, and will be the focus of this year's Legislative Conference.

Preservation and protection of the Postal Service means:

Enacting comprehensive postal reform legislation (similar to H.R. 756 and H.R. 760, H.R. 6076, or S. 2629 during the last Congress), which still has not been formally introduced as legislation in the 116th Congress. Two years ago, the bills identified were passed by unanimous voice votes of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, but languished before the House Ways and Means Committee and in the Senate.

Restoring the Postal Service’s financial stability by eliminating or delaying payments to the Retiree Health Benefits Fund, by improving investments of this Fund, and by correcting pension errors in both the CSRS and FERS Retirement Systems.

The USPS Fairness Act, H.R. 2382, is bipartisan legislation that has been introduced by Representatives Peter DeFazio (D-OR), Tom Reed (R-NY), Xochitl Torres Small (D-NM), and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) to repeal the onerous pre-funding requirement for the Retiree Health Benefits Fund. **UPDATE: H.R. 2382 passed the House on February 5, 2020, with a vote of 309-106. Senators Steve Daines (R-MT) and Brian Schatz (D-HI) introduced bipartisan companion legislation, S. 2965.**

H.R. 2553 also is bipartisan legislation that has been introduced (in early May 2019) by Representatives Stephen F. Lynch (D-MA) and David B. McKinley (R-WV). It would provide for certain index fund investments from the Retiree Health Benefits Fund, rather than restricting the Fund to low-yielding Treasury bonds. This bill is identical to H.R. 760 in the last, 115th Congress, which was passed by the full Oversight and Reform Committee in the House.

Halting subcontracting or other privatization schemes, and retaining six-day, if not seven-day, delivery, as these positions also will protect the Postal Service brand and its ability to develop new and better products during the coming years.

H. Res. 33 — Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that Congress should take all appropriate measures to ensure that the United States Postal Service remains an independent establishment of the Federal Government and is not subject to privatization. Sponsor: Rep. Stephen F. Lynch (D-MA)

H. Res. 23 — Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that the United States Postal Service should take all appropriate measures to ensure the continuation of door delivery for all business and residential customers. Sponsor: Susan A. Davis (D-CA)

H. Res. 54 — Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that the United States Postal Service should take all appropriate measures to ensure the continuation of its 6-day mail delivery service. Sponsor: Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)

Reversing the January 2015 changes to USPS service standards and/or adopting a moratorium on additional closings or consolidations of mail processing facilities.

H. Res. 60 — Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that the United States Postal Service should take all appropriate measures to restore service standards in effect as of July 1, 2012. Sponsor: Rep. David B. McKinley (R-WV)

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Working to Prevent Harmful Legislation

The NPMHU will work, together with similarly interested parties, to prevent legislation harmful to mail handlers and other postal employees. Given President Trump’s aggressive use of executive action, this also includes opposition to Executive Orders reducing bargaining rights of federal employees and trying to cut the official time used for union business conducted by union representatives. Also on the NPMHU’s legislative radar are various proposals included in the Trump Administration budget to cut retirement and health care benefits for federal and postal employees.

Also to be opposed by representatives of the NPMHU:

- Proposals to eliminate or curtail prevailing wage laws, particularly under the Service Contract Act.
- Proposals to raise health insurance premiums for federal employees or to weaken the Federal Employee Health Benefit Program.
- Proposals to reduce retirement security for current and future retirees, including potential cuts in Social Security or in the CSRS and FERS programs or potential increases in employee contributions.
- Efforts in various state legislatures to enact “do not mail” or anti-“junk mail” bills that allow individuals to remove their names and addresses from mailing lists used for commercial mail purposes.
- Proposals to single out federal and postal employees by prohibiting their employment if monies are owed to the IRS for failure to pay taxes.

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Working to Enact New Legislation

Although the political atmosphere on Capitol Hill and in the White House is not conducive to positive change, the NPMHU will continue to urge Congress to adopt legislation to improve the lives and working conditions of mail

handlers and other postal and federal employees. These efforts will focus on the following pieces of legislation:

- Legislation to eliminate or curtail the Government Pension Offset.
UPDATE: The Social Security Fairness Act (H.R. 141/S. 521) as introduced by Rep. Rodney Davis (R-IL-13) and Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) calls to repeal GPO/WEP
- Legislation to eliminate or curtail the Windfall Elimination Provision.
UPDATE: The Social Security Fairness Act (H.R. 141/S. 521) as introduced by Rep. Rodney Davis (R-IL-13) and Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) calls to repeal GPO/WEP. Additionally, the Equal Treatment of Public Servants Act (H.R. 3934), introduced by Rep. Kevin Brady (R-TX-08), provides WEP-affected individuals age 60 and older with a monthly rebate of \$100 (\$50 for surviving spouses). For WEP-affected individuals currently under age 20, the bill would change how the WEP is calculated. For those between age 21 and 59, the individual's WEP penalty would be calculated either using the current formula or the new one created by the bill, whichever is more beneficial.
- Legislation to provide pre-tax health care premiums for postal and federal retirees (premium conversion).
- Legislation, at the federal level, to increase the minimum wage, and legislation, at the state and local level, to provide a guaranteed living wage, in excess of the federal minimum wage, to workers and their families.
- Legislation, primarily at the state and local level, to encourage democratic participation through "vote by mail" initiatives.
- Legislation or other congressional action to eliminate or discourage the subcontracting or outsourcing of postal jobs to private contractors.
- Legislation to reform U.S. labor laws – through the enactment of the Employee Free Choice Act or similar proposals – to eliminate delays, provide for effective remedies for violation of the law, and to return to the original purposes of the National Labor Relations Act.
- Legislation to ensure the future viability of Social Security.

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Preparing for the 2020 Elections

Campaigns no longer occur between Labor Day and Election Day, with most candidates seeking office running longer and more expensive campaigns. Beginning now, and continuing into next year, the NPMHU will join with others in the American labor movement to prepare for the 2020 U.S. Presidential and Congressional elections, as well as upcoming state and local elections (a few of which will be held in 2019). The NPMHU will take all reasonable steps to ensure that mail handlers and their families are actively involved in these upcoming elections, through voter registration, education, and 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.