

MAIL HANDLERS FACE ATTACKS FROM CONGRESSIONAL RHETORIC

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The new year started with a legislative victory for the National Postal Mail Handlers Union, but then quickly pivoted to vigorous defensive measures to protect the United States Postal Service, and Mail Handler jobs and benefits.

On January 5, 2025, then-President Biden signed the Social Security Fairness Act into public law, P.L. 118-273. This has been a legislative priority for the Mail Handlers for several decades and through a groundswell of grassroots support of those impacted at the federal and state level, legislation was able to pass in the U.S. House of Representatives by a vote of 327–75 and in the U.S. Senate by a vote of 76–20. The law now allows Mail Handlers and others in the public sector to access their full Social Security benefits, ensuring their spouses and dependents will have financial stability in retirement.

This legislative win was quickly overshadowed by threats on Mail Handlers' retirement benefits as a means of national deficit reduction. In developing a federal budget plan for the next ten years, the House Budget Committee circulated a proposal that would impact current and future postal employees. Among the Budget Committee's recommendations were previous proposals the Mail Handlers Union successfully fought against. These included eliminating the Federal Employee Retirement System (FERS) Supplement for those who retire before they are eligible for Social Security benefits; calculating FERS annuities with the average of the highest basic pay over five consecutive years, instead of the current three consecutive years; and, eliminating official time unless unions compensate the federal government. New proposals included: requiring all FERS-enrolled employees to contribute 4.4 percent of their pay to their benefits regardless of when they were hired; make newly hired employees choose between being at-will

and having a lower FERS contribution plan; charge a fee for employees who appeal adverse actions to the Merit System Protection Board; convert the Postal Service Health Benefit Plan to a premium-share voucher model.

These proposals would produce an estimated savings of \$81.1 billion over ten years, but this does not take into account the contributions to deficit reduction the postal and federal workforces have already made. Since 2011, those who work across the federal government have contributed over \$300 billion in savings. Additionally, these proposals fail to acknowledge that those who work for the federal government are mostly in the middle-class, often living paycheck to paycheck. Make no mistake, these proposed changes to FERS benefits will directly result in lowered pay. This means

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it would be more difficult for Mail Handlers to keep up with the price of inflation on everyday items. Additionally, it undermines the bargaining rights and the power of the union movement. We have seen firsthand the power in unionizing — through increased worker pay, workplace protections, and the appeals process. These savings are accomplished on the backs of workers. The National Postal Mail Handlers Union lobbied Congress, expressing concern on these cuts and will continue to do so as the federal budget process moves forward.

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would have eliminated the USPS Board of Governors and the Postal Regulatory Commission; move USPS under the Department of Commerce; and privatize certain aspects of the Postal Service — most likely mail handler jobs. After *The Washington Post* reported President Trump was considering signing this EO, NPMHU National President Hogrogian issued a statement, which included, “The Postal Service, through the work of its 640,000 employees, is responsible for ensuring that every American receives packages and mail ranging from Social Security checks, necessary medications, government correspondence, packages, and mail from loved ones. The Postal Service is an institution that is ingrained in our Constitution and older than the United States of America itself.” While the EO did not come to fruition, NPMHU remains vigilant on this existential threat and how it could impact our members and postal customers.

Helping to protect the Postal Service from the threat of privatization, members of the House of Representatives introduced a resolution calling to protect the USPS. H. Res. 70, as introduced by Representatives Steve Lynch (D-MA-08), Nick Lalota (R-NY-01), Andrew Garbarino (R-NY-02), and Gerry Connolly (D-VA-11), expresses the sense of the House the Postal Service should remain a public entity and not be subject to privatization. Commenting on the threat of privatization, Rep. Connolly stated, “Privatizing the Postal Service is an attack on Americans’ access to critical information, benefits, and life-saving medical care.”

It’s not all doom and gloom on Capitol Hill. Legislators introduced bills that would secure benefits for mail handlers and other employees throughout the federal government.

The Federal Retirement Fairness Act, H.R. 1522, would allow Mail Handlers hired as an MHA after 1989 to make additional contributions to their FERS benefits to make up for the time they worked but weren’t earning the benefits because of their part-time status. Reps. Gerry Connolly, David Valadao (R-CA-22), Nikki Budzinski (D-IL-13), and Don Bacon (R-NE-02) introduced the bill on February 24. Upon its introduction, Rep. Valadao commented, “For too long, federal employees who started their careers in temporary positions have been unfairly penalized when it comes to their retirement benefits. The Federal Retirement Fairness Act is a common sense, bipartisan solution to ensure our hardworking public servants can retire on schedule.” Rep. Budzinski

added, “Many federal workers — like postal employees — got their start in ‘non-career’ roles that do not count towards their retirement benefits. It’s long past time that we address this unfair loophole. Amidst growing uncertainty facing the federal workforce, I’m proud to introduce this legislation and ensure that all federal workers receive the full benefits they have earned.”

To help with this messaging, the NPMHU is hosting its Legislative Conference this May in Washington, DC. This will be an opportunity for Mail Handlers to learn our Union’s legislative agenda for the 119th Congress, as well as pointers on how to effectively lobby their elected officials in order to effectively make change on Capitol Hill.

Shortly before publication, the House and Senate introduced the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act. The PRO Act strengthens current federal laws by allowing private-sector workers to organize and join a union and bargain for better wages and benefits. The bill passed in the House during the 117th Congress, after which bill sponsor Representative Bobby Scott (D-VA-03) commented, “Labor unions are essential to rebuilding America’s middle class and improving the lives of workers and their families. Unfortunately, over the past 70 years, union membership has dropped to the lowest level since just after the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) was first enacted.... It is plainly obvious that the NLRA is too weak to defend workers’ rights against intensifying anti-union attacks from wealthy special interests.”

While members of Congress are hearing from the NPMHU national office, they also need to hear from their constituents on how these issues impact them back home. To help with this messaging, the NPMHU is hosting its Legislative Conference this May in Washington, DC. This will be an opportunity for Mail Handlers to learn our Union’s legislative agenda for the 119th Congress, as well as pointers on how to effectively lobby their elected officials in order to effectively make change on Capitol Hill.

As the Mail Handlers Union continue to see threats against our jobs, our union, and the services we provide, we will fight for our members and educate elected officials on the need for a public Postal Service while protecting postal employees’ earned benefits.