

CONGRESS HAS QUESTIONS ABOUT SERVICE

Katie Maddocks, Legislative and Political Director



Postmaster General Louis DeJoy faced service questions during an at-times terse congressional hearing on May 17. Aggravated members of the House Subcommittee on Government Operations asked the only witness why their constituents' mail was severely delayed and why assistance from the United States Postal Service was lacking. PMG DeJoy responded that, within the past two years, 98 percent of the country receives their mail and packages within less than three days. However, Representatives Tim Burchett (R-TN-02), Jeff Duncan (R-SC-03), Becca Balint (D-VT-AL) rejected that assertion, raising specific concerns within their districts and states that their constituents experienced with delayed mail and packages, casting doubt in the abilities of the Postal Service.

Representatives Russell Fry (R-SC-07) and Greg Casar (D-TX-31) brought up concerns with dilapidated working conditions that cause safety issues for workers and hinders service to customers. Rep. Fry relayed frustrations of a post office facing maintenance issues that not only impacted the postal building itself but caused traffic issues on a busy road. Similarly, Congressman Casar addressed problems of overheating in facilities that lead to safety concerns of workers. Not only had Congressman Fry and Casar reached out to the USPS on the issue, but so had Senators Lindsay Graham (R-SC) and Tim Scott (R-SC). The Postal Service provided no adequate response. Instead, Mr. DeJoy conceded he inherited deferred maintenance

issues, but he does not see it as a widespread problem.

Mirroring concerns and questions from the Mail Handlers, Congresswoman Balint wanted reassurances from the PMG that network changes resulting in new Sorting and Delivery Centers (SDCs) will not further erode service along with employee terms of employment. Mr. DeJoy responded that SDCs will "save service" as the current system is geared towards volume expectations that do not meet current volume reality.

As President Hogrogian has expressed, often it feels like the new SDCs are high on concept and short on detail. The NPMHU is following this issue closely to make sure that the implementation of SDCs will not be disruptive not just to postal customers, but to postal employees as well.

COUNTDOWN TO SHUTDOWN

Here we go, for what feels like the hundredth time — Congress is on another collision course towards a federal government shutdown. Members of the House of Representatives and the Senate are struggling to develop spending levels for the upcoming fiscal year, with factions within the parties threatening to not support bills if certain amendments are included. At best, a continuing resolution (CR) could be reached which would carry-over spending levels from the current fiscal year. This scenario not only ignores the inherent fact of rising costs that the country is facing, but it would also trigger a stipulation from the earlier deal to raise the debt

ceiling that calls for a one percent cut to all federal agencies if a CR is implemented for a full fiscal year. And this one percent cut is just a floor, not a ceiling — members of Congress could call for deeper cuts.

While a federal government shutdown will not directly impact the Postal Service or NPMHU members as USPS is not an appropriated agency, it will directly impact federal agencies and departments' abilities to meet their congressionally mandated missions and goals. A shutdown will directly affect agencies that support victims of natural disasters, provide aviation and border security, assist taxpayers, allow businesses to grow and expand, keep our communities safe and guard our prisons, and make sure that the food we eat and the products we use are safe. Additionally, shutdowns have a devastating impact on the national economy. In 2013, the federal government shut down for seventeen days at a cost of \$24 billion, while the partial federal shutdown from December 22, 2018, to January 25, 2019, cost \$11 billion.

Over sixty percent of the members of the U.S. House of Representatives were in office during the 2018/2019 shutdown, and over eighty percent of the U.S. Senate were in office at the time. Hopefully, memories of the impact of the last shutdown were long-lasting and will provide motivation for elected officials to come together to develop bipartisan spending levels. However, we're already hearing rumblings of an impasse due to right-wing Republicans not backing down on cuts to spending

while left-wing Democrats are calling for stronger protections of social programs. By the time of publication, we should have a better idea of whether these notions are just talk or if a compromise can be made.

STRIKE FEVER

It's hard not to be aware of strikes occurring across the country. Thanks to their celebrity union members, the most well-known are the concurrent strikes by the Writers' Guild of America (WGA) and the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA). Additionally though, there are several smaller strikes happening across the country, including those from UNITE Here, IBEW, and UFCW. The United Autoworkers Union is preparing for a possible strike against the three major American auto manufacturers — GM, Ford, and Chrysler — if contract agreements cannot be reached.

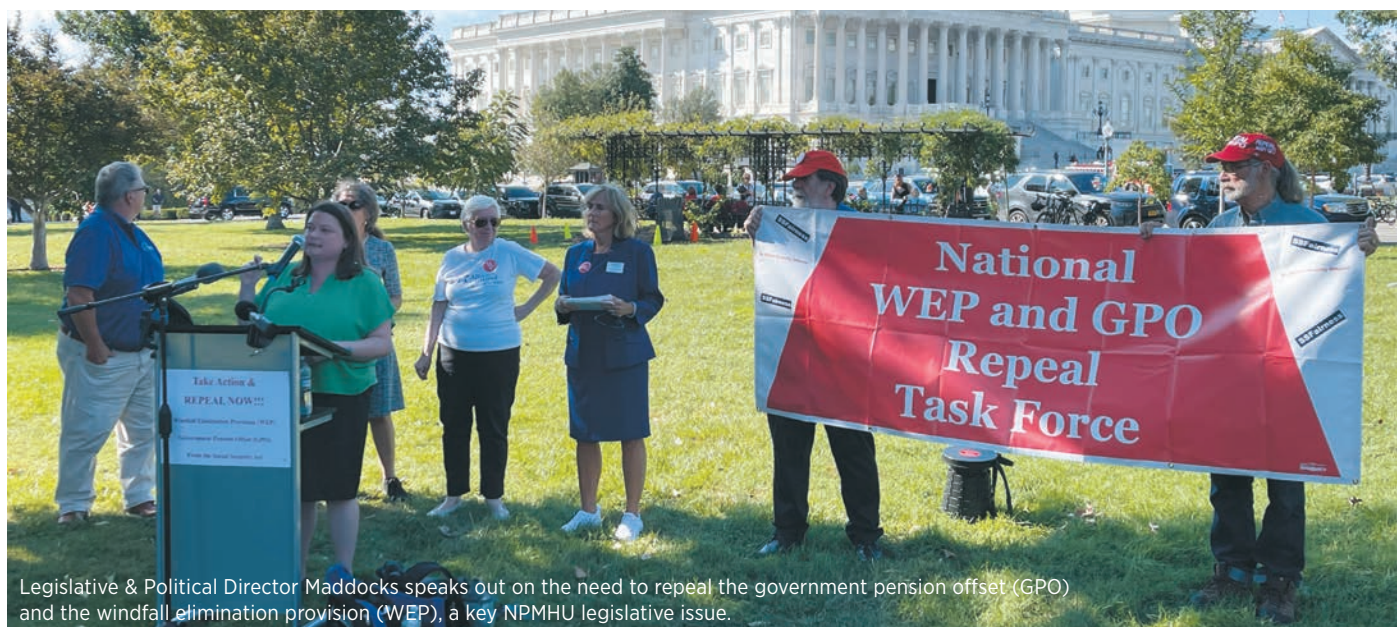
In the favor of these striking workers, national approval of unions is currently at its highest since 1965 according to an August 2022 Gallup poll. While sixteen percent of households across the country have a union member, seventy-one percent of Americans see labor unions

as a benefit to workers. When asked the reasons for joining a union, 65 percent of respondents to the poll indicated it was for better pay and benefits; 57 percent said it was for better employee rights; 42 percent said it was for job security; and, 34 percent said to obtain a better pension or retirement plan.

To ensure that all Americans have access to union representation, the Mail Handlers Union will continue to advocate for legislation that promotes labor rights. The Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, H.R. 20/S. 567, ensures that workers in right-to-work states can still be represented by unions, allowing unions to enter into contracts with employers to collect dues from the workers they represent. Those who face retaliation due to their union involvement will be protected from loss of work, providing a right to an injunction so workers can return to work while they wait for their case to be resolved. The bill also allows for supportive boycotts and strikes, so unions can show solidarity with their brothers and sisters without the threat of being replaced while striking. If employers violate these rights, workers will be able to seek justice in a court of law if the NLRB fails to act.

Furthermore, the PRO Act expands the penalties employers will face if workers' rights are violated. Under the PRO Act, employers would face fines issued by the NLRB for wrongful termination as well as personal liabilities imposed on directors or other members of corporate leadership who actively violate workers' rights or fail to take preventative action. The bill will also ensure that employers cannot force employees to waive their right to class-action and collective lawsuits. Employers will also be required to educate their workers on rights under the improved NLR Act.

The support the PRO Act is receiving in both the House and Senate is reflective of an overall shift in attitude towards the benefits of labor. In the Senate, the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee reported on the bill, while the House bill has two Republican co-sponsors. This might seem insignificant, but this is the first time in decades it can be called bipartisan. With this growth of support, the NPMHU is seeing a better understanding and benefits of organized labor from moderate and conservative members of Congress — what the Union has always understood.



Legislative & Political Director Maddocks speaks out on the need to repeal the government pension offset (GPO) and the windfall elimination provision (WEP), a key NPMHU legislative issue.