

## **What's Up in Washington: January 2014**

By: Meredith Place

Last month, Congress passed a \$1.1 trillion spending bill that included language preserving 6-day delivery; NALC honored the first anniversary of President Emeritus Vincent R. Sombrotto's death; Senator Coburn announced he's retiring early, and the Senate committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs began debate on Postal Reform.

### **6-day delivery is preserved in \$1.1 trillion spending bill**

The 113<sup>th</sup> Congress is on track to be the least productive Congress in history. However, after the New Year lawmakers finally got down to business passing a \$1.1 trillion spending bill. NALC was extremely relieved to see **language calling for six-day mail delivery service** part of the bill. NALC leaders every year have to stand over the shoulders of lawmakers to guarantee 6-day language, which has been part of such bills for 30 years, stays put. President Rolando expressed his satisfaction, stating

*"We are grateful that Congress recognizes the value of Saturday delivery to millions of American businesses that rely on the most efficient last-mile delivery system in the world... As the economy recovers and e-commerce booms, the Postal Service has returned to operational profitability, which would be threatened by cutting the Saturday service on which millions of small businesses and residents rely... Now we call on it to enact reform that will allow the Postal Service to innovate and grow—without dismantling the retail, processing and delivery networks that make it a national treasure."*

[Click here](#) to learn what else was included in the \$1.1 trillion spending bill passed on January, 17<sup>th</sup> 2014.

### **NALC celebrates life of President Emeritus, Vincent R. Sombrotto**

On January 11<sup>th</sup>, letter carriers came together with friends and family members of President Emeritus Sombrotto to honor the first anniversary of his death in New York City. Sombrotto, 89, was a towering figure in the history of the National Association of Letter Carriers and one of the most significant U.S. labor leaders of recent decades.

In 1947, Sombrotto joined what was then the Post Office Department as a part-time letter carrier after serving with distinction in the U.S. Navy in World War II. Sombrotto was just rank-and-file letter carrier at Grand Central Station in New York City, when he assumed leadership of the pivotal 1970 wildcat postal strike. Carriers risked arrest by walking off their federal jobs to protest dismal working conditions and poverty-level wages that entitled some to federal assistance programs. Within hours, carriers and other postal employees in one city after another across the country joined the strike. President Richard Nixon called in the troops to deliver the mail, but they proved unable to carry out the task in an effective manner. The walkout eventually resulted in the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970 with full collective-bargaining rights for all postal employees. The following year, Sombrotto was elected president of NALC Branch 36 in New York City. Seven years later, he was elected as NALC's 16th national president, a position he would hold from 1978 to 2002.

His seven-term tenure atop the union was marked by extraordinary changes in the letter carrier craft and by remarkable progress for letter carriers. As national president and chief contract negotiator, Sombrotto, led the NALC in seven highly productive rounds of collective bargaining that provided basic wage increases in every contract, preserved uncapped cost-of-living adjustments and improved letter carrier working conditions. Sombrotto's many achievements as NALC president included turning the union's political action fund, the Committee on Letter Carrier Political Education (COLCPE), into one of

\*Please note some of the contents of this article were written by NALC's Communication Dept.

the largest and most effective political action committees in the labor movement while dramatically improving the union's political and legislative operations. He also served as a vice president of the AFL-CIO. To learn more about Vincent R. Sombrotto check out this [NYT article](#)

### ***Senator Coburn announces early retirement***

Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK), ranking member of the Senate committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs announced shortly after the New Year that he will cut his term short and step down after the current congressional session ends. Senator Coburn has been suffering from prostate cancer. His early retirement will allow the state to hold a special election this year on Election Day. Coburn's early exit prompts some to wonder what he'll want his legacy to be and will this include Postal Reform. Read more about his announcement [here](#).

### ***Senate committee debates Carper-Coburn substitute for S. 1486 "The Postal Reform Act of 2014"***

At the end of the month, the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs began debating the **future of your job** via S. 1486. This bill was first introduced last summer. NALC thoroughly opposes the legislation because 'it calls for the slow dismantling of the Postal Service's invaluable retail, mail processing, and last-mile delivery networks' while attacking hurt workers to save a penny. See NALC's [fact sheet](#) to learn more.

On January 29<sup>th</sup>, several committee members offered amendments to Carper-Coburn's revised version of S. 1486. Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), called for an immediate end to six-day delivery; Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY) proposed an amendment calling on the Postal Service to declare bankruptcy and reorganize. His amendment would force all collective-bargaining agreements between USPS and its employee unions renegotiated, while existing no-layoff protections and the ability to bargain over wages would be banned. Thankfully, both of these amendments were voted down.

During the meeting, NALC's friend, Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT) called for the removal of the bill's unfair provisions regarding injured workers. As written, S. 1486 balances the books on the already down trodden, hurt workers. Unfortunately, Tester's amendment failed, and the FECA reform language was retained.

Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) voiced her concerns over the new bill's call to transfer rate-setting authority from the Postal Regulatory Commission the Postal Board of Governors as well as her concerns about a revised price index system. These

The committee will reconvene to continue its mark-up of S. 1486 on Thursday, Feb. 6 at 10 a.m.

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