



## Social Security, postal reform, and retirees

**T**he months ahead promise to be extremely busy legislatively. Postal reform is at the top of our legislative agenda, as it should be. The Postal Service, like Social Security, is in need of an adjustment. Unfortunately, there are many legislators on Capitol Hill who would like nothing better than to make changes to both systems that would spell disaster for those of us who will be directly affected by the changes they make. While the House bill (HR 22) has been introduced in the 109th Congress in much the same fashion as was done in the 108th, the Senate has yet to introduce a bill. In the meantime, the USPS Board of Governors has weighed in, and the news is not good! The Board has written to Senator Susan Collins, Chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, to offer its input regarding the changes needed. In part, the Board has recommended that *employee benefits* should be subject to negotiation at the same table as wages! While I am sure that Senator Collins is not easily intimidated, the message is quite clear. The Board is seeking to *reduce* the benefits offered to the very people who are keeping the ship afloat!

**How does this affect those of us already retired from the Postal Service?** “Employee benefits” would include retirement and health benefits! You must remember that one of the initial proposals from the President’s Commission on Postal Reform was to place postal employees in their *own* retirement and health plans! While this language did not make it to the bill introduced in the House, there is no guarantee that it would not be included in the Senate version! The residual effect of an entirely new retirement and health program could have a negative impact on the benefits currently being paid out. It could also be that those currently retired may be “grandfathered” in, but who wants to take that chance? And as we have done for our entire careers, we must also continue to protect the benefits to those still carrying the bag.

The current national debate over the future of Social Security is one we retirees must also pay close attention to. Many retirees rely on the small percentage of Social Security they receive. Do we want to see that measly

amount further eroded? Others get *zilch!* Do we ever expect to see the Windfall Elimination and Government Pension Offset Bills amended? I can assure you of one thing: if the plan to take 30 percent of the incoming monies *out* of the system is accepted, you can kiss any hope of improvement goodbye!

Social Security covers more than 96 percent of America’s workers. In 2004, benefits were paid out to 47 million retirees, survivors, and disabled persons. They have never missed a payment in more than 70 years! While it is true that Social Security is in need of adjustment, it is *not* broke, nor in crisis! Do not be duped by political rhetoric.

There are many ways to ensure continued coverage through the years, regardless of how many baby boomers will soon be retiring. One way that is presently being discussed in many forums on Capitol Hill is to raise the ceiling on contributions. If you were not aware, there is a “ceiling” on which Social Security taxes are paid. Social Security tax is paid only on wages up to \$90,000. Anyone who earns more than \$90,000 a year does not have to pay Social Security taxes on any earnings above that amount! If that ceiling were raised, even temporarily, there would be no need to divert monies from the system and full benefits would be payable for a long time! That is only one of the many available means of ensuring the viability of the Social Security program long term, without resorting to diversion of funds.

**It is incumbent upon us all to stay alert so we can protect** what we have fought so diligently for throughout our careers. If you have not yet done so, I urge you to become involved in our legislative network. By simply signing up as an e-Activist, you can be alerted to what the issues are, and when to contact your representatives for action. In case you are unfamiliar with newly elected representatives or are new to an area, the NALC can supply you with all the information you need about them. Just refer to the back cover of the March *Postal Record* or sign up online. Please take a few moments now to become involved. Everyone involved will be looking to America’s retirees for direction on these important issues. Let us lead the way. ☒