

Medicare Part B Special Enrollment Period runs through September

The Special Enrollment Period (SEP) has arrived and runs through Sept. 30. The SEP is a result of the Postal Service Reform Act that created the Postal Service Health Benefits (PSHB) Program within the existing Federal Employees Health Benefits Program. A major component of the Postal Service Reform Act was the integration of Medicare with the PSHB program.

Retirees aged 65 or older who have not yet enrolled in Medicare Part B have a chance to enroll without being subject to the late enrollment penalty during this special one-time-only period. If they enroll, the Postal Service will pay for the rest of their lives any annual penalties on the premium for not having enrolled during their initial enrollment period. For those who did not enroll in Medicare Part B when they were first eligible, this is a chance to opt in at a time when they might need it more, without having had to pay the premiums earlier when they did not need it, or a penalty for opting in late.

Eligible retirees should have received notice and enrollment instructions from the Postal Service. To read more about the PSHB Program, see the January issue of *The Postal Record*.

President Renfro leads the rally in Las Vegas.



As Las Vegas carriers rally, NALC calls on Congress to pass H.R. 7629

"Nearly every single day, we hear about another letter carrier who is a victim of a violent crime, targeted armed robberies, violence, assault, shooting—and yes, even murder," NALC President Brian L. Renfro told a rally of NALC members, supporters and members of the media in downtown Las Vegas on April 17. "I'm furious that our members, the very people who walk the streets and serve as the eyes and ears of communities, are the people being targeted for harm."

"Here in Nevada and across the country, these crimes are physical and emotionally hurting letter carriers," Las Vegas Branch 2502 President **Paul Peterman** said. "These crimes need to stop now, not only for our good, but for the good of every resident, business and neighborhood we serve."

To illustrate that point, letter carrier **Roberta Dang** told the attendees that she was delivering mail last year when she was pushed down and knocked unconscious by an assailant. "My ankle [had] a completely torn tendon and my toe was smashed in, so it became a hammer toe," she said. "When I woke up again, the woman was gone." Dang said she's still recovering from the attack.

Carrier **Mike Roksvold** said that he had a sawed-off rifle pointed to his head. "They were in an apartment complex doing smash-and-grab, stealing money from people's cars and stuff, and were dumb enough not to show up with their own car," he said. The thieves stole his postal vehicle but stalled it and fled on foot before being caught by police.

The rally, which received widespread coverage including from the local CBS, NBC, Fox and ABC TV affiliates plus the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* and *Las Vegas Sun*, served to raise awareness about crimes against letter carriers and the need to pass the Protect Our Letter Carriers Act (POLCA), H.R. 7629. More rallies were planned for late April in Port St. Lucie, FL, and Baltimore, MD.

"Today we are here to send a very clear message: Enough is enough is enough," President Renfro said on the day the bill was announced.

"The next step is critical, and that next step is federal legislation that will deter these attacks from happening, prosecute every criminal who attacks one of our members, and protect letter carriers while doing their jobs," Renfro said. "We are very grateful to two of our great friends in Congress, Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) and Congressman Greg Landsman (D-OH), for introducing legislation, the Protect Our Letter Carriers Act."

This bipartisan legislation would provide \$7 billion in funding for the Postal Service to secure its infrastructure. The funding would be appropriated over five years, \$1.4 billion annually in fiscal years 2025 to 2029. When key infrastructure is devalued and more secure, letter carriers will be safer on their routes.

Additionally, the legislation would increase prosecution rates for these crimes by requiring the attorney general to designate an assistant U.S. attorney in each judicial district to prioritize cases involving an assault or other crime against a letter carrier. Their principal responsibility in the district would be to coordinate and supervise the investigation and prosecution of these crimes.

The bill also would strengthen sentencing guidelines for these crimes, ensuring that they are treated in the same manner as assaults on federal law enforcement officers.

"I urge the House to pass this bill that would protect the nation's letter carriers who dutifully deliver medications, checks, ballots, packages and other essential mail that all Americans depend on," President Renfro said at the outdoor event on Capitol Hill, flanked by NALC officers and staffers, the two co-authors of the bill, a variety of other postal stakeholders and labor leaders, and news outlets.

Since 2020, there have been more than 2,000 crimes committed against letter carriers on the job, marking a mass targeting of letter carriers that previously did not exist. Many of these attacks involve a gun or another weapon. Last year alone, the number of carriers injured in robberies doubled from the prior year.

Renfro called on NALC members to urge their members of Congress to become co-sponsors of H.R. 7629. The goal is to surpass 290 co-sponsors to force the bill to be considered on the House floor. As of April 25, there were 48 co-sponsors.

President Renfro said that passing H.R. 7629 is NALC's legislative priority. He encouraged letter carriers to contact their members of Congress, and to ask supporters within their communities to do the same. Go to nalc.org/action to learn more.

House committee holds second hearing on WEP and GPO repeal

On April 16, the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Social Security held a hearing on the repeal of the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and Government Pension Offset (GPO).

These two provisions are parts of Social Security law that unfairly reduce—or sometimes eliminate—the Social Security benefits of public employees, including letter carriers, who have earned pension benefits from public employee pension plans such as the Civil Service Retirement System. The Social Security Fairness Act (H.R. 82/S. 597), a priority bill for NALC, would repeal the WEP/GPO. The bill has 318 co-sponsors in the House and 53 in the Senate.

The hearing included testimony from four witnesses: Jason Fichtner, chief economist, Bipartisan Policy Center; Rachel Greszler, visiting fellow in workforce, Economic Policy Innovation Center; Nancy Altman, president, Social Security Works; Charles Blahous, who is the J. Fish and Lillian F. Smith Chair, senior research strategist, Mercatus Center at George Mason University.

In his opening statement, Chairman Drew Ferguson (R-GA) acknowledged that the WEP and GPO "were intended to make Social Security more fair, but for millions of Americans, they have fallen far short."

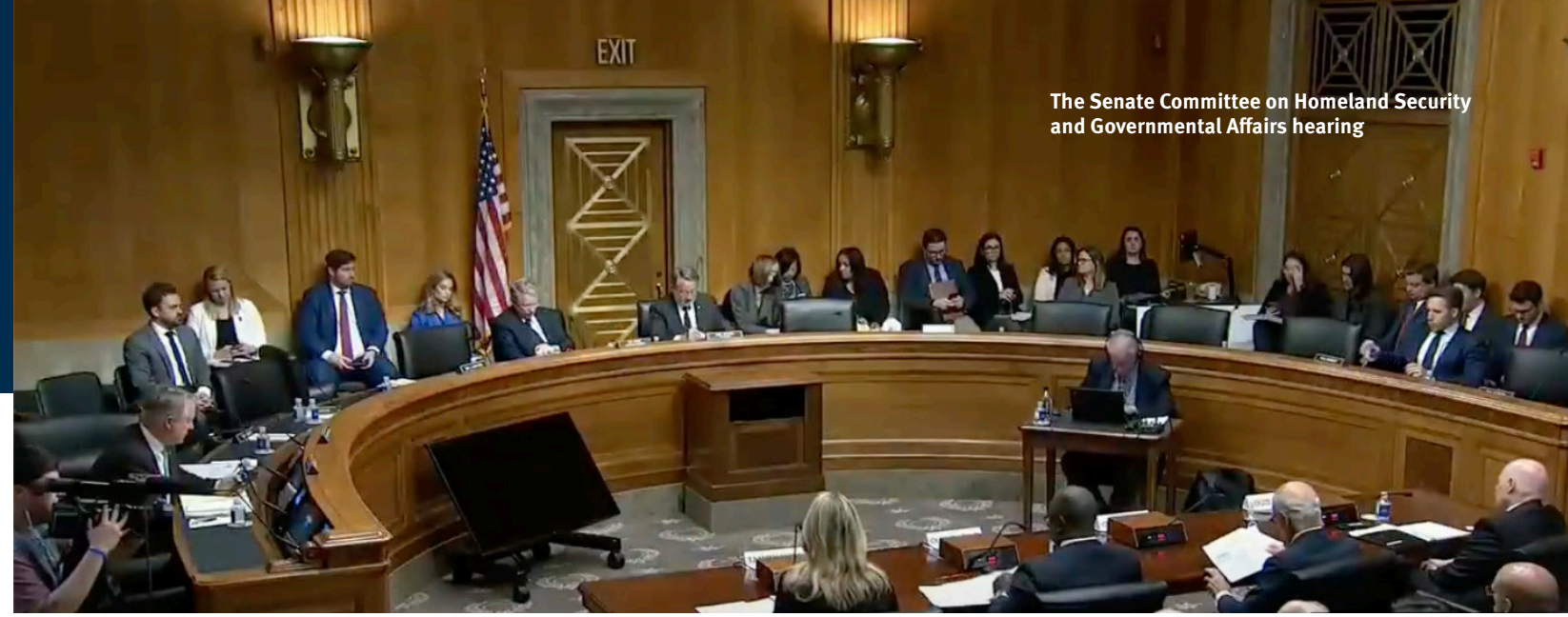
Ranking Member John Larson (D-CT) also expressed his support for repealing the WEP and GPO, calling the provisions "blatantly unfair," and emphasized his support for a broader legislative package to improve Social Security's solvency.

At the hearing, witnesses offered several opinions on reforming or repealing WEP/GPO, as well as methods to improve Social Security's solvency. While several approaches were mentioned, NALC fully supports H.R. 82/S. 597, which repeals both WEP and GPO.

Many members referenced the unfair burden these provisions impose on public service workers and their spouses.

The hearing followed a field hearing in Baton Rouge, LA, in November. The Louisiana hearing featured witnesses affected by the WEP and GPO, including a police officer, a retired state employee, a firefighter and a teacher.

The next step is for the bill to be marked up by the House Committee on Ways and Means. NALC strongly urges the committee to mark up the bill and send it to the floor for a House vote.



Senate committee holds hearing on Postal Service oversight

On April 16, the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs held a hearing on oversight of the Postal Service. The hearing focused on service issues, network modernization, implementation of the Postal Service's 10-year strategic Delivering for America (DFA) plan, USPS's finances and other topics.

Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, Chairman of the USPS Board of Governors Roman Martinez, Chairman of the Postal Regulatory Commission Michael Kubayanda and USPS Inspector General Tammy Hull testified at the hearing.

In his opening statement, Postmaster General DeJoy acknowledged the success of the Postal Service Reform Act of 2022 but emphasized that it was only the first step: "What we need now is for our stakeholders to support us in the implementation of key self-help initiatives outlined in the Delivering for America plan that are critically necessary and that will ultimately enable our operational and financial success."

In his opening remarks, Chairman Martinez focused on the Postal Service's finances and referenced "uncontrollable factors" that negatively affect the agency's bottom line, such as the requirement for postal retirement funds to be invested in low-yield U.S. Treasury bonds, which produce minimal returns, and the Postal Service's disproportionate obligation to Civil Service Retirement System pension funds.

Chairman Kubayanda expressed concern with the Postal Service's performance in his opening statement and encouraged the agency's leaders to be "transparent with stakeholders."

In her opening statement, Inspector General Hull discussed ongoing audits of regional processing and distribution centers in Virginia, Georgia and Oregon, as well as service performance reviews in Missouri, Minnesota, North Dakota, California and Washington, DC.

Many of the questions posed by senators focused on the implementation of the plan and its effects on service. Sens. Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), Jon Ossoff (D-GA), Laphonza Butler (D-CA), Josh Hawley (R-MO), Roger Marshall (R-KS) and Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) all referred to specific local issues related to service delays or problems with postal facilities.

DeJoy acknowledged issues in the plan's rollout, especially in Atlanta, GA, and Richmond, VA. "We apologize to the constituents that have received that service. But in the long term, if we don't make these changes, that will be every day everywhere around the nation," he said. While the postmaster general recognized the "significant obstacles" that lie ahead for the DFA plan, he also cited the "significant progress" that has been made.

Outside of service questions, Ranking Member Rand Paul (R-KY) criticized the Postal Service's labor practices. He called converting non-career postal workers to career "nonsensical" since it makes their pay and benefits more expensive for the agency. DeJoy defended the decision, saying that it was the "right thing to do," and that it improved employee retention.

In their questioning, Chairman Gary Peters (D-MI), Sen. James Lankford (R-OK) and Ranking Member Paul all stated that the Postal Service needed a new investment strategy for its retirement funds instead of keeping them in low-yield Treasury bonds. NALC has had productive conversations on Capitol Hill with lawmakers about an updated, responsible, more-profitable investment strategy for these funds.

Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE) brought up the Postal Service Health Benefits Program, which is set to launch this year under the Postal Service Reform Act. When asked if the Postal Service and the Office of Personnel Management were prepared to implement this program, DeJoy said it "is moving nicely along and we'll be ready to implement."

Sens. Butler and Rosen also brought up the upcoming election and the Postal Service's immense responsibility to deliver tens of millions of ballots. Postmaster General DeJoy ensured that the agency was prepared and committed to another successful election season. Inspector General Hull agreed that this is a top priority. She said that the OIG will release its election mail readiness audit in late summer and will visit delivery units and plants across the country to observe operations and flag problems in advance of November's Election Day.

The hearing concluded with Chairman Peters saying he remains "laser-focused" on service. He emphasized the need for transparency and requested a list of locations the Postal Service plans to change with specific timelines for implementation, full-service data on every location implemented so far, and documentation for any cost projections from Postmaster General DeJoy by May 1. The two did not reach an agreement on that.



Postmaster General DeJoy testifies.

Food Drive Day is Saturday, May 11

The nation's largest single-day food drive is almost here. The Letter Carriers' Stamp Out Hunger® Food Drive is Saturday, May 11.

Letter carriers have teamed with postal employees and volunteers to collect a total of 1.9 billion pounds of food since the first national food drive in 1993. Donations are collected from postal patrons who leave a bag of nonperishable food next to their mailbox on the second Saturday in May.

One in 8 Americans, including millions of children, senior citizens and veterans, are unsure where their next meal will come from. The Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive helps to relieve shortages of food that food pantries experience in spring and summer, when holiday food donations are depleted and schools are closing for the summer.

"Letter carriers know the struggles that people in their communities face—they see it every day," NALC President Brian L. Renfro said. "For more than three decades, we've helped to meet their needs each May, and it's time to pull off this annual miracle again."

The annual food drive wouldn't be possible without the support of our national partners: the U.S. Postal Service, the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association, Vericast, United Way Worldwide, the AFL-CIO, Valpak, Kellanova and CVS Health. These partners help by paying for the specially marked postcards, donating thousands of pounds of food and thousands of dollars to food pantries, donating bags that letter carriers distribute to customers, gathering volunteers, or getting out the message about the food drive.

NALC's social media team and Communications Department at Headquarters and our national partners will continue spreading the word and raising awareness for the Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive. Remember to follow the food drive's official social media accounts on Facebook at facebook.com/StampOutHunger and on X (formerly known as Twitter) at @StampOutHunger to stay up to date and learn more about NALC's national partners. To find or send messages about the food drive on either platform, use #StampOutHunger.

Many branches are using both traditional and innovative ways to promote the drive in their communities, such as the efforts of Hagerstown, MD Branch 443.

"This year, a local billboard company has agreed to display a food drive ad on two of their electronic billboards in Hagerstown, and a local movie theater is showing a 30-second ad for the food drive before all of their showtimes," Branch 443 food drive coordinator **James Gelwicks** said.

The branch has made reusable magnetic signs for the postal trucks to advertise the food drive, and also had a movie night, for which members who donated food received a free movie ticket. "We were able to give out over 60 movie tickets to our members in exchange for well over 500 pounds of nonperishable items, and we dropped off those donations at the Maryland Food Bank to be added to our total that we will collect on May 11," Gelwicks said.

Food Drive Day doesn't end until we weigh the donations to measure our success. Branches need to report the pounds of food they've collected via the Members Only portal by June 7.

Letter carriers who have questions about the food drive should contact their local branch coordinator. Regional and state food drive coordinators are available to assist; a contact list can be found on the Food Drive Tool Kit page at nalc.org/food under the heading "Important information for coordinators." More information about the Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive can be found online at nalc.org/food.



The magnetic food drive signs

