



News from Washington

Ask your representative to co-sponsor the Federal Retirement Fairness Act (H.R. 5995)

The **Federal Retirement Fairness Act** (H.R. 5995) was reintroduced in the House by Reps. Derek Kilmer (D-WA), David Valadao (R-CA), Don Bacon (R-NE) and Gerry Connolly (D-VA) on Oct. 19. The bill would allow certain federal employees, including letter carriers, to make catch-up retirement contributions for time spent as non-career employees after Dec. 31, 1988, making it creditable service under the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS).

H.R. 5995 would cover letter carriers who were employed as casuals, transitional employees or city carrier assistants, providing them with greater retirement security.

Currently, the bill has 29 co-sponsors—16 Democrats and 13 Republicans. It is important to build support and momentum for this bill, which would affect more than half of the active letter carriers.

All letter carriers are encouraged to visit NALC's Legislative Action Center and ask their representative to co-sponsor H.R. 5995. Visit nalc.org/action to contact your representative.

Equal COLA Act introduced in Senate

On Nov. 1, Sen. Alex Padilla (D-CA) introduced the Equal COLA Act (S. 3194). The bill would ensure that cost-of-living adjustments are applied equally to federal retirees.

Under current law, there is a discrepancy between COLA increases for Civilian Service Retirement System (CSRS) and Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) retirees. COLAs for CSRS retirees are determined by the rate of inflation measured by the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers in the third quarter of a year compared with the third quarter of the previous year. COLA benefits for FERS retirees are based on the same percentage change; however, the increase is

limited, based on certain criteria.

If the CSRS COLA increase is more than 3 percent, FERS retirees receive 1 percent less than the full annual COLA. If the CSRS COLA increase is between 2 and 3 percent, FERS retirees receive a 2 percent COLA. If the CSRS COLA increase is less than 2 percent, FERS retirees receive the full annual COLA.

For example, earlier this year the Social Security Administration announced a 3.2 percent COLA increase for 2024. Therefore, CSRS will receive this 3.2 percent boost in benefits while FERS retirees will only receive a 2.2 percent increase.

Sens. Ben Cardin (D-MD), Patty Murray (D-WA), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) were all original co-sponsors of S. 3194. Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-VA) introduced a House version of the Equal COLA Act (H.R. 866) in February. The House version has 43 co-sponsors—40 Democrats and three Republicans.

"All retired letter carriers deserve to receive the same cost-of-living increases," NALC President Brian L. Renfroe said. "It is time for this disparity to be fixed so that our retired members, and all federal retirees, receive equal COLA adjustments."

Congress funds government through early 2024

Congress again narrowly avoided a potential shutdown last month. As Congress neared the Nov. 17 government funding deadline, the House passed a two-tiered stopgap funding bill on Nov. 14 on a 336-95 vote, the Senate passed it on Nov. 15 with an 87-11 vote and President Joe Biden signed it into law the following day. The short-term solution funds the government at current levels, avoids a government shutdown and excludes extreme funding cuts proposed by members of the House Freedom Caucus.

The two-tiered, or laddered, continuing resolution has two deadlines. Funding for

military and veteran programs, agriculture and food agencies and the Departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development will expire on Jan. 19, 2024, while the Departments of State, Defense, Commerce, Labor, and Health and Human Services are funded through Feb. 2, 2024.

The stopgap bill was the first major test for new Speaker of the House Mike Johnson (R-LA). House Freedom Caucus members took a hard stance against the bill, with 93 Republicans ultimately voting against it. A bipartisan stopgap agreement to fund the government at the end of September sealed Rep. Kevin McCarthy's (R-CA) fate as House speaker. After passage of a continuing resolution, Freedom Caucus members voted to oust McCarthy as their leader, triggering a three-week-long search for a new House speaker, eventually landing Johnson the job. Despite opposition from some Republican members, so far there are no reports of any plans to oust Johnson after this deal.

Two House Democrats, Reps. Jake Auchincloss (D-MA) and Mike Quigley (D-IL), voted against the measure since it did not include additional aid for Ukraine.

With the new deadlines in place, both chambers will continue working on the 12 appropriations bills for 2024. The House has passed seven, while the Senate has passed three. If the chambers cannot come to an agreement by the end of April 2024, the 1 percent spending cuts agreed to in the June debt-limit bill are scheduled to begin.

There is no clear path for the chambers to reach an agreement on spending levels. Senate appropriations bills follow the spending levels agreed to in the debt-limit deal, with an additional \$14 billion request for emergency funds. On the other side, House funding bills come in below the debt-limit deal's spending caps.

NALC will continue to monitor the appropriations process and will keep letter carriers informed of any important developments. **PR**