

NNA heralds senate passage of 21st Century Postal Act

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

By just two votes more than the minimum required, the U.S. Senate recently passed S 1789, the bipartisan 21st Century Postal Act, 62 to 37.

National Newspaper Association (NNA) President Reed Anfinson, publisher of the Swift County Monitor-News in Benson, Minn., hailed the Senate's vote as a critical step toward restoring the U.S. Postal Service to soundness.

"A new postal reform law is still far from reality, but the work done in the Senate this week and last week represents a new commitment by our nation's leaders to maintaining universal service while undertaking much needed repairs on our nation's postal system," Anfinson said. "The two-week debate required to get this far demonstrates how challenging it is to find the right solutions. But we are on the way, at long last."

S 1789, authored by Sens. Susan Collins, R-ME; Joe Lieberman, I-CT; Thomas Carper, D-DE; and Scott Brown, R-MA, sets up significant changes in postal workers benefits, trims the postmaster general's salary and gives the Postal Service cash to initiate buyouts of retirement-eligible staff. It also maintains six-day mail delivery and overnight mail service standards for local mail while USPS pursues other cost-cutting measures that do not attack essential services.

NNA Postal Committee Chair Max Heath, who provided inspiration and technical assistance to NNA's Congressional Action Team (CAT), said he was heartened by the bill's passage.

"No legislation on a system as complex as USPS will be perfect, but the leadership of Collins and Lieberman in establishing continued viable service for mailers lays the groundwork for USPS to pursue meaningful restructuring. Newspapers must have a delivery system they can count on. S 1789 will give our members assurances that Congress is taking our concerns seriously," he said.

Anfinson said NNA's CAT realized how critical mail delivery is to rural and small town America.

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“Without sound postal delivery, our newspapers cannot reach readers in time for them to use the news and information we bring them. Particularly in an election year when timely political and civic information is essential, we simply cannot afford to let the Postal Service fall apart.”

Heath took issue with a number of senators who saw the bill as a “temporary fix.”

“Proposals to blow up the system under the guise of retooling are the misleading temporary solutions. Making drastic service cuts might produce some short term cash savings, but the long-term loss of mailers’ confidence would lead to long-term pain and surely leave taxpayers saddled with billions of dollars in obligations to postal retirees. It is better to fix the system we have,” he said.

“And some of the Postal Service’s overdone proposals for plant closings and service reductions are a form of self-destruction,” Heath added.

The House of Representatives has not yet voted on postal reform. House leadership will have the option of taking up HR 2309, a bill by Reps. Darrel Issa, R-CA, and Dennis Ross, R-FL, that would lead to drastic service cuts, or begin its reform debate with the Senate bill.

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