

...Postal jobs under attack

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vitalize the agency and bust the unions. The USPS is a \$65 billion annual business with over \$100 billion surplus in its pension and retiree health benefit funds, over 30,000 post offices (much of it in prime downtown locations), and 200,000 vehicles.

The unions have endorsed bills introduced earlier this year by Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont), in the Senate, and Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-Oregon) in the House.

S. 316, the Postal Service Protection Act, would sustain the Postal Service, avert unnecessary closures and save jobs. It has 30 cosponsors, including Oregon's Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden. Washington Senators Patty Murry and Maria Cantwell have not signed on to the legislation.

The House version is H.R. 630. The

bill has 167 cosponsors, including all of Oregon's congressional Democrats. Republican Greg Walden does not support the bill.

And with Republicans in control of the House, union officials aren't holding much hope that H.R. 630 will advance.

In fact, Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.), chair of the House Oversight & Governmental Reform Committee, is one of the driving forces behind privatization.

In 2011, Issa — one of the wealthiest members of Congress, worth between \$300 million and \$450 million, according to the Center for Responsive Politics — introduced the Postal Reform Act of 2011. The bill would have created an independent commission to run the USPS and it would have enacted \$10.7 billion in austerity measures, such as ending Saturday delivery, closing post offices, and laying off workers.

On Jul 24, 2013, the committee Issa chairs approved Issa's new bill, HR 2748, by a 22-17 party line vote. The bill includes almost every proposal from the 2011 legislation, but also proposes to establish "competition advocates" to promote contracting out, and to prohibit customers from appealing decisions to close post offices, stations or branches if a "contract postal unit" is opened within two miles.

By the same margin, 22-17, Issa's committee rejected Democratic proposals to protect workers' collective bargaining rights, to return billions of dollars in prior pension overpayments to the USPS, and to protect injured employees from sudden cut-off of workers' comp payments.

Issa's bill has little chance of advancing in the Democratic-controlled Senate.

The Hill newspaper reported that Sens. Carper and Coburn will push the bill after lawmakers return from recess in September.

No safety violations found in worker's death at fab shop

VANCOUVER — The Washington Department of Labor & Industries (L&I) found no safety violations at Thompson Metal Fab in Vancouver, where Sheet Metal Workers Local 16 member Michael Carpenter was killed March 15.

Carpenter was grinding a metal support on an oil derrick when he was crushed by a falling steel plate. His death was the first-ever fatal accident at the shop, which has been in operation since 1937.

L&I's Division of Occupational Safety and Health began its inspection March 16, and issued its report July 23. As no violations were found, the employer was not cited, and no penalties were assessed. A spokesperson for the agency said the investigation file is confidential.

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