

# POSTAL NEWS

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## **1. Letter carriers union has new president**

2 days ago

WASHINGTON (AP) — Frederic V. Rolando is the new president of the National Association of Letter Carriers.

Rolando, 56, took over leadership of the 300,000-member postal union on the retirement of William H. Young, the union announced Monday. Rolando had been executive vice president.

A 31-year postal veteran, the new union head began his postal career in South Miami, Fla.

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JULY 6, 2009

## **2. Electronic Outreach Tests House Rules**

By JOHN D. MCKINNON and GREG HITT

WASHINGTON -- House members are spending millions in taxpayer funds on email and other electronic outreach to voters, often in ways that avoid their traditional rules on constituent communications.

During the nine months ended March 31, which included the run-up to the last election, House members spent about \$3.5 million from their office accounts on electronic outreach, according to a Wall Street Journal review of expense records.

Congressional rules bar lawmakers from using their free-mail privilege -- known as franking -- to send mass mailings through the U.S. Postal Service in the 90 days

before an election. One goal of those limits is to curtail the advantage of incumbency and to discourage entrenched lawmakers from driving up taxpayer costs in a flurry of pre-election appeals to potential voters. But rules for email, congressional Web sites and social-media tools are far less restrictive, and in some cases nonexistent.

Some rules regarding online communications exist in the House handbook. It says, for instance, that content of electronic outreach should abide by the strict rules governing franked mail. But unlike the franking rules, the handbook regulations are only guidelines, and members' online communications sometimes stray from them. For example, many lawmakers post self-promoting biographies on their official Web sites, although the franking rules prohibit mailing such materials.

In the case of email, lawmakers are allowed to contact constituents within the 90-day run-up to an election, so long as they are communicating with individuals who have signed up for their email newsletters. That has spurred many lawmakers to hire vendors who use data-mining to ferret out email addresses for thousands of their constituents. Then the lawmakers send out mass emails seeking to sign up their constituents for the newsletters.

Further, lawmakers use information they collect on constituents' interests to target them with issue-oriented emails -- a tactic drawn from recent political campaigns. No House rules specifically address these practices.

"They can call it keeping in touch with constituents or introducing themselves to the district, but in the end it has the benefit of perpetuating their incumbency," said Pete Sepp, vice president of the National Taxpayers Union, a group that favors limits on taxes, spending and debt.

A spokesman for the Committee on House Administration said the growing use of email, including sophisticated techniques known as data-mining and micro-targeting, lets lawmakers "more effectively provide information to constituents who express interest in specific issues ... [and] more effectively represent the interests of their constituents."

Spending to automate and expand communications with constituents is a bipartisan activity. Among the top 10 spenders for this technology in the House, five are Republicans and five are Democrats.

Within 90 days before last fall's election, Rep. Sam Graves sent an electronic newsletter to 8,000 constituents in his rural Missouri district. Dubbed "Straight Talk with Sam," the email touted the Republican lawmaker's support for middle-class tax relief.

"Time after time, Nancy Pelosi and the liberals in Congress think they can spend your money better than you can," he wrote.

Mr. Graves, who was a big target of Democratic strategists last year, sent that email during a hard-fought re-election bid using software and services acquired through his taxpayer-funded congressional office account, according to congressional expense records and Mr. Graves's staff.

Over the past three quarters, Mr. Graves paid \$15,675 to iConstituent LLC, a company that helps manage the congressman's email database. The database includes a list of some 35,000 contacts; the 8,000 constituents who received the newsletter in October were part of a smaller group that opted to receive communications, which allowed the congressman to reach out to them when House rules otherwise barred him from sending mail through the Postal Service.

"Sam believes it's a part of any congressman's job to be in touch with his district," said spokesman Jason Klindt. "That's what this software does."

Among House leaders, Speaker Nancy Pelosi reported spending about \$11,510 from her office account on email services during the nine months ended March 31.

Brendan Daly, a spokesman for Ms. Pelosi, said that "the speaker views electronic outreach the same way she views other outreach -- as a way to keep her constituents informed about her work in Congress and to hear their concerns. There is nothing in her e-newsletter that she has not said on the floor of the House."

Minority Leader John Boehner of Ohio reported spending \$1,050 from his office accounts on email and Web services in the nine months ended March 31. Representatives for Mr. Boehner declined to comment.

Senate expense reports provide little detail on technology-related office spending.

The leading vendor receiving congressional office funds for email and Web services was iConstituent, which got a total of \$1.6 million during the past nine months, according to expense records. Fireside 21 and a former parent company received about \$550,000 from House members. Dialogconcepts Inc., another contractor, received \$393,000, according to expense reports.

Zain Khan, iConstituent's chief executive, said the point of email microtargeting is to enhance communication and improve efficiency, not create political advantage. "We're very straightforward [about] the benefit -- it is to the constituent," Mr. Khan said.

—T.W. Farnam contributed to this article.

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#### Corrections & Amplifications

A spokesman for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said last week regarding her email outreach to constituents that "the speaker views electronic outreach the same way she views other outreach -- as a way to keep her constituents informed about her work in Congress and to hear their concerns." The spokesman, Brendan Daly, added, "There is nothing in her e-newsletter that she has not said on the floor of the House." A previous version of this article incorrectly stated that Ms. Pelosi's office didn't respond to requests for comment.

### **3. China postal revenue up 13% to \$11.2 bln in first half**

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TAIYUAN, July 6 (Xinhua) -- China's postal revenue rose 13.1 percent year on year in the first half of this year to an estimated 76.5 billion yuan (11.2 billion U.S. dollars), according to China's State Post Bureau.

"The country's postal industry had gradually waited out the adverse effects of the financial turmoil and economic slowdown, as the industry's revenues have begun to climb since the beginning of this year," said Ma Junsheng, director of China's State Post Bureau, on Monday.

Business revenues from express mail service increased 9.7 percent year on year to an estimated 21.25 billion yuan in the first six months.

China's postal revenue rose to 140.7 billion yuan in 2008, up 15.9 percent from 2007.

Ma said there were about 40,000 post offices in rural China, but farmers in some out-of-the way towns and villages still had no access to mail service, adding that the country was endeavoring to help all farmers enjoy mail services in coming years.

He said last month during an online interview on [www.gov.cn](http://www.gov.cn) that the nation would build more than 6,000 post offices in its vast rural areas over the next three years.

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