

WEP REFORM WORK CONTINUES

Neal & Brady Push Bipartisan Effort

When gauging whether or not legislation may have a chance of advancing through Congress or the State Legislature, a tell-tale sign is the level of staff activity happening behind the scenes.

This spring brought a distinct uptick in activity surrounding the proposal to reform the Social Security Wind-

fall Elimination Provision (WEP) from a widespread network of organizations advocating for reform. Most importantly, the work was not limited to WEP reform advocates.

Following instructions from their respective bosses, the staffs of House Ways and Means Chairman Kevin Brady

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MASS RETIREES MEETS WITH CONGRESSMAN RICHIE NEAL IN SPRINGFIELD

L-R: Rep. Richie Neal, Pres. Frank Valeri, Leg. Dir. Shawn Duhamel, Counsel Bill Rehrey, Soc. Sec. Consultant Tom Lussier

Social Security

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(R-TX) and Ranking Member Richard Neal (D-MA) are hard at work crafting the fine details of a bipartisan proposal to reform the WEP. This work extends to the Social Security Administration, as well as the Congressional Budget Office (CBO).

Despite assurances from Brady that he intended to advance WEP legislation through the current Congressional session (which ends December 31st), efforts appeared stalled late in 2017 as Congress grappled with tax reform, immigration policy and the political upheaval that continues to make legislating increasingly difficult.

In May, Association officials met with Neal in his Springfield office for a briefing on where efforts currently stand. Neal's designation as "Ranking Member" signifies his status as the lead Democrat on Ways and Means.

"Congressman Neal continues to be instrumental in getting a WEP deal done in 2018. Without his and Chairman Brady's commitment, this proposal and any hope of passing a reform would be off the table," says Association Legislative Director Shawn Duhamel. "We can see the work being put into finally resolving WEP, which is no small task, otherwise it would have been done years ago.

"We know how much this means to our members, who have been victimized by the WEP law and witness a large portion of their Social Security benefit unfairly

taken away. Collectively, we are doing everything we can to pass a reform bill through Congress and get it onto the President's desk for approval this year."

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SHAWN DUHAMEL

Lessons From 2016

An attempt to pass reform legislation in 2016 failed when the bill, H.R. 711, was blocked from advancing beyond the Social Security Subcommittee. Since then, Brady and Neal have worked together to overcome the concerns that were raised at the time.

Under the basic premise of the proposal, those currently eligible for Social Security and subject to the WEP will receive a rebate for a portion of their benefit lost to the WEP. The WEP will no longer be in effect for future retirees, who will be subject to a revised Social Security formula that fairly accounts for time paid into Social Security vs. a separate retirement system (such as the MA public retirement systems).

An area of concern has been the

need for a transition period before the new formula takes effect for future retirees. This is partially to maintain the so-called thirty-year rule for existing public workers, who have worked to amass at least thirty years of substantial contributions under Social Security and are therefore exempt from the WEP.

"In 2016 there were legitimate concerns amongst the IAFF and other unions surrounding a transition period that were not addressed before H.R. 711 was unveiled. A very deliberate process is now underway to put together a fair proposal that addresses the concerns of today's active employees, while providing meaningful relief for current WEP'd retirees," explains President Frank Valeri. "WEP is a national issue that impacts roughly 2 million people all across the country. The reform proposal has to account for the concerns of the various groups impacted, otherwise we'll end up with another standoff like we had in 2016."

Members impacted by the WEP should monitor *Mass Retirees'* digital communication channels and weekly toll-free hotline message for the latest news.

As we have reported in the past, current reform proposals apply only to the WEP and not the Government Pension Offset (GPO). The GPO law reduces and, in most cases, eliminates spousal Social Security benefits for public retirees. While related to the WEP, the GPO is a separate and distinct issue that Congress has insisted on addressing through future legislation.