



May 8, 2024

Postal Primer: Post Office Naming

The U.S. Postal Service (USPS) has independent authority to name or designate its postal facilities. Additionally, Congress may designate a post office through legislation. This In Focus describes the policies and procedures for renaming (also referred to as designating or dedicating) postal facilities in honor of one or more individuals.

Post Offices Designated by USPS

The U.S. Post Office Department, the predecessor of the USPS, issued early guidance regarding the names of post offices in the 1800s. Under current USPS policy, naming a postal facility requires the approval of the Postmaster General. Postal facilities may be dedicated only for individuals who have been deceased for at least 10 years, with the exception of deceased U.S. Presidents, Postmasters General, or former members of the Postal Service Board of Governors. These limitations do not apply to post offices dedicated by Congress (U.S. Postal Historian, 2008).

Post Offices Designated by Congress

The first post office designation by Congress came in 1967 in honor of Representative Charles A. Buckley, although the postal facility was never constructed. Since 1967, Congress has dedicated (or rededicated) 980 postal facilities. Most designated facilities have been retail post offices, though Congress has dedicated at least one mail processing and distribution facility (P.L. 108-259) and two carrier annexes (P.L. 112-223; P.L. 110-217).

Leased versus Owned Postal Facilities

USPS maintains approximately 25,000 leased facilities and 8,500 owned facilities. Congress may designate both leased and owned postal facilities. Permission from the lessor is not required prior to designating a leased facility. USPS encourages congressional staff to reach out to their states' USPS liaisons to discuss any facilities under consideration for renaming. The liaison may consult with USPS to verify the condition of the facility, status of the lease, or other issues. In the event that a dedicated post office is relocated to a new address (e.g., due to nonrenewal of its lease), a bill to change the address of the dedicated facility may be introduced. For example, P.L. 116-15 updates the address of the post office that was originally dedicated by P.L. 115-347.

Post Offices Designated in the 117th and 118th Congresses

In the 117th Congress, 64 post offices were designated by standalone post office designation statutes. Additionally, 24 post offices were designated (and one address changed for an existing designated post office) by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, Division EE, Post Office Designations (P.L. 117-328). As of May 7, 2024, seven post

office designation bills have been enacted in the 118th Congress.

Congressional Rules and Procedures for Post Office Designation Bills

Each chamber has its own formal and informal procedures for the consideration of post office designation bills, including limitations on who may be an honoree. In the Senate, the post office designation limitations are formalized in Rule 3(F) of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. In the House, the procedures are found in Rule 13(b) of the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability. Additionally, a bipartisan “Dear Colleague” letter from the committee explains its procedures (though not a formal rule) for the consideration of postal facility naming bills in the 118th Congress.

Post Office Honorees: Limitations

With certain exceptions, Congress will not typically consider post office naming bills that honor living persons. In the Senate, under Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Rule 3(F):

The Committee will not consider any legislation that would name a postal facility for a living person with the exception of bills naming facilities after former Presidents and Vice Presidents of the United States, former Members of Congress over 70 years of age, former State or local elected officials over 70 years of age, former judges over 70 years of age, or wounded veterans.

Similar language appeared in Committee Rule 3(F) in the 117th, 116th, and 115th Congresses.

House committee rules have no such limitations. Instead, according to the House “Dear Colleague” letter, the committee will not consider legislation designating post office buildings for a person for whom Congress already named a post office. The letter also expresses the committee’s policy against consideration of post office naming bills that would honor living persons or any person who is not a U.S. citizen (with exceptions for military service members and veterans). Similar “Dear Colleague” postal policy letters were issued in the 116th, 115th, 114th, and 112th Congresses. However, the letters of previous Congresses did not include the citizenship requirement. A “Dear Colleague” postal policy letter was not issued in the 113th Congress.

Post Office Designation: Multiple Honorees

Generally, a postal facility is dedicated in honor of a single person. However, a U.S. post office may be dedicated in honor of multiple individuals. For example, P.L. 116-232 dedicates a U.S. post office in Henning, TN, in honor of

Paula Croom Robinson and Judy Spray, two postal employees killed during an armed robbery at the post office. In another example, P.L. 117-295 dedicates a post office in Schaumburg, IL, in honor of all “veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan.”

Format for Post Office Naming Bills

The “Dear Colleague” letter issued by the House Oversight and Accountability Committee suggests that post office naming bills be drafted using a standard format and bill language, such as “An Act to designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 5003 Westfields Boulevard in Centreville, Virginia, as the ‘Colonel George Juskalian Post Office Building.’” There is no such suggestion in the Senate rules.

Role of State Delegations in Post Office Naming Bills

In the Senate, under Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Rule 3(F):

The Committee will not consider legislation that would name a postal facility unless it has the support of both Senators in the delegation of the state in which the facility is located.

In the House, the “Dear Colleague” letter states that post office naming bills “should have the co-sponsorship of the entire state delegation where the post office is located.” Post office naming bills need not be cosponsored by the Speaker of the House, the House majority leader, or the House minority leader.

Preparing a Background Packet for Post Office Naming Bills

In the House, the “Dear Colleague” letter asks that the sponsor of a post office naming bill provide to the committee (1) documentation on the designee’s biographical information and background, (2) documentation that the designee’s family supports the bill, and (3) determination from USPS that the facility is eligible to be named. The Senate rules do not contain a similar provision.

Floor Consideration of Post Office Designation Bills

Most post office naming acts originate in the House. Under House Oversight and Accountability Committee Rule 13(b), “consideration of bills designating facilities of the United States Postal Service shall be conducted so as to minimize the time spent on such matters by the Committee and the House.” This language is also found in Committee Rule 13(b) in the 117th, 116th, 115th, 114th, and 113th Congresses.

The House Committee on Oversight and Accountability has generally approved multiple postal naming bills “en bloc” (i.e., concurrently) and by unanimous consent. Passage by the House has almost always been routine, often under suspension of the rules requiring two-thirds affirmative for passage, and commonly by voice vote or a unanimous roll call vote.

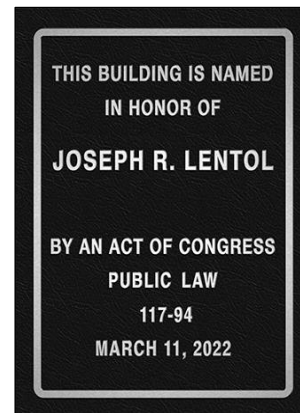
As in the House, postal naming bills tend to be uncontroversial in the Senate. The Senate often considers multiple postal naming bills concurrently, passing them by unanimous consent without debate.

USPS Dedication Ceremony and Plaque

USPS officials are responsible for developing plans for the dedication ceremony. The dedication ceremony may take place at the post office or at a nearby location that can better accommodate a large group of people. For example, the dedication ceremony for the Indiana Hunt-Martin post office in Buffalo, NY, was held nearby at George’s Field.

For operational and logistical reasons, a post office that has been dedicated by Congress will retain its original name and geographical designation within USPS’s addressing system. To commemorate the designation, a plaque approximately 11 by 14 inches is installed in a prominent, secure place within the post office. The plaque notes the honoree and public law number.

Figure 1. USPS Dedication Plaque



Source: USPS, “Joseph R. Lentol Post Office Building Dedication Ceremony.”

Notes: Specifications for the plaque are provided in USPS guidance.

A post office designation statute may instruct USPS to include specific language in its dedication plaque. For example, P.L. 108-442 required the USPS plaque “include inscriptions containing the names, ranks, branches of service, hometowns, and dates of death of those men and women of Nevada who have lost their lives while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces in the global war on terrorism and in Operation Iraqi Freedom.”

While post office naming does not typically involve the installation of any commemorative artwork or signage other than the dedication plaque, there has been at least one instance where artwork of the honoree was installed in a dedicated post office pursuant to legislation. In 2020, P.L. 116-198 allowed USPS to accept and display a portrait of Scipio A. Jones in the Little Rock, AR, post office that had been dedicated in his honor in the 110th Congress.

Michelle D. Christensen, Analyst in Government Organization and Management

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.