CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE
COST ESTIMATE

June 24, 2004

S. 2468
Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act

As ordered reported by the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs on June 2, 2004

SUMMARY

S. 2468 would change the laws that govern the operation of the United States Postal Service (USPS), particularly those regarding the cost of pensions and health care benefits of retired workers and the requirement to hold certain funds in escrow. CBO estimates that enacting this legislation would result in on-budget savings of $20.2 billion and off-budget costs of $35.8 billion over the 2005-2014 period. (The net expenditures of the USPS are classified as "off-budget.") Thus, CBO estimates the net cost to the unified budget would be $15.7 billion over the 2005-2014 period. Those costs would constitute direct spending. (The bill would not affect revenues.) In addition, we estimate that implementing S. 2468 would cost about $90 million (less than $10 million a year) over the 2005-2014 period, assuming appropriation of the necessary amounts.

Enacting S. 2468 would not affect how much the federal government spends on pension or health care benefits for USPS retirees. By increasing how much the Postal Service pays to finance those benefits and by eliminating the current-law escrow account requirements, however, the bill would increase future budget deficits as measured by the unified federal budget. Eliminating the escrow account requirement for the USPS would allow that agency to increase spending for capital improvements or other projects, pay down its outstanding debt, postpone or diminish future rate increases, or some combination of these options. Enacting the bill also would reduce direct spending by making the costs of the Postal Rate Commission subject to appropriation and by reducing payments made by the Postal Service for workers' compensation.

S. 2468 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act (UMRA) and would impose no costs on state, local, or tribal governments.

Major provisions of S. 2468 would:

- Eliminate a requirement in Public Law 108-18 (P.L. 108-18), the Postal Civil Service Retirement Funding Reform Act of 2003, that the Postal Service place savings from reduced pension contributions in escrow.

- Transfer from the Postal Service to the Department of the Treasury responsibility for paying pension costs associated with military service credits.

- Replace direct payments the Postal Service is making for retiree health care costs with payments designed to prefund the health care costs of current employees when they retire.

- Revise the procedure for raising postal rates.

- Strengthen the USPS Board of Governors and the Postal Rate Commission, which would be redesignated the Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC).

- Make other changes designed to increase the Postal Service's competitiveness with private industry.

ESTIMATED COST TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The estimated budgetary impact of S. 2468 is shown in Table 1. The costs of this legislation fall within budget functions 370 (commerce and housing credit), 550 (health), 900 (net interest), and 950 (undistributed offsetting receipts).

TABLE 1. ESTIMATED BUDGETARY EFFECTS OF S. 2468

	By Fiscal Year, in Billions of Dollars									
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
CHANGES IN DIRECT SPENDING [a]										
On-Budget Effects										
Estimated Budget Authority	0.0	2.4	-2.3	-2.4	-2.5	-2.7	-2.9	-3.1	-3.3	-3.5
Estimated Outlays	0.0	2.4	-2.3	-2.4	-2.5	-2.7	-2.9	-3.1	-3.3	-3.5
Off-Budget Effects										
Estimated Budget Authority	*	2.9	3.2	3.5	3.6	3.9	4.2	4.4	4.8	5.2
Estimated Outlays	*	2.9	3.2	3.5	3.6	3.9	4.2	4.4	4.8	5.2
Total Unified Budget Effect										
Estimated Budget Authority	*	5.4	0.9	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.4	1.4	1.6	1.7
Estimated Outlays	*	5.4	0.9	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.4	1.4	1.6	1.7

NOTES: Components may not add to totals because of rounding.

* = savings of less than $50 million.

a. Implementing the bill also would affect discretionary spending, subject to the availability of appropriated funds. CBO estimates that those discretionary costs would be less than $10 million a year.

BASIS OF ESTIMATE

For this estimate, CBO assumes that S. 2468 will be enacted near the start of fiscal year 2005. CBO estimates that enacting the bill would result in on-budget savings of $20.2 billion and off-budget costs of $35.8 billion over the 2005-2014 period, for a net cost to the unified budget of $15.7 billion over the 10-year period. In addition, we estimate that implementing S. 2468 would cost about $90 million over the 2005-2014 period, assuming appropriation of the necessary amounts, mostly to fund the PRC.

Background

The following paragraphs present background information relating to the major provisions of S. 2468, mostly for postal finances affected by the bill.

Budgetary Treatment of USPS. Although the Postal Service is a federal agency, its financial operations are classified as off-budget. Despite this treatment, federal budget documents present the net income (gross income minus expenses) of the agency in the unified budgetary totals for the federal government. The Postal Service is required by law to set postage rates to cover its full costs, although from year to year its net income may be positive or negative. In fiscal year 2003, the Postal Service generated $69.5 billion in collections, mostly from postage and user fees, and had $64.2 billion in expenses, for a net cash surplus of $5.3 billion in that year.

USPS and Federal Retirement Plans. Postal Service employees participate in the federal government's two main defined benefit pension programs. Those workers initially hired prior to 1984 are covered by the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) while those initially hired after 1983, as well as former CSRS workers who elected to change federal retirement plans in 1987 or 1998, participate in the Federal Employees' Retirement System (FERS). In 2003, about 30 percent of the USPS workforce was covered by CSRS, and the rest were under FERS.

The Postal Service and its employees each make payroll contributions toward the civilian retirement system (CSRS and FERS). Unlike other agencies, the agency contribution rate for most CSRS employees is 17.4 percent of basic pay (most other agencies contribute 7 percent), while the employee contribution rate is 7 percent.[1] For FERS employees, the agency contribution rate for most employees is 10.7 percent, while the employee rate is 0.8 percent, plus Social Security payroll taxes on both employers and employees. Workers in CSRS receive generally higher benefits than those in FERS, but unlike FERS, those in CSRS do not participate in Social Security and do not receive agency contributions toward the Thrift Savings Plan. In addition to its payroll contributions, the Postal Service also makes annual amortization payments toward an unfunded liability within CSRS. In 2003, that payment was about $300 million.

USPS and Federal Health Benefits. The Postal Service also pays a portion of health care premiums for currently retired USPS employees who are eligible to participate in the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) program. Currently, there are over 400,000 Postal Service retirees who participate in the FEHB program. On average, the Postal Service currently pays about 45 percent of the health care premiums for its retirees. Retirees pay about 30 percent of their FEHB premiums with general revenues accounting for the remaining amount, roughly 25 percent. In 2003, the Postal Service paid $1.1 billion to FEHB for premiums for current retirees.

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1. P.L. 108-18 increased the contribution rate the Postal Service pays for its CSRS employees from 7 percent to 17.4 percent. That legislation also eliminated a series of amortization payments the Postal Service was required to make for unfunded CSRS liabilities. For more details, see CBO's cost estimates of the Postal Civil Service Retirement System Funding Reform Act of 2003 (S. 380 and H.R. 735 from the 108th Congress). These estimates are posted on www.cbo.gov.

USPS Escrow Fund. Starting in October 2006, the Postal Service will be required under current law to begin holding funds in an escrow account equal to the difference between what the Postal Service currently pays toward CSRS and what it would have paid for CSRS benefits prior to the enactment P.L. 108-18. Under current law, CBO estimates the Postal Service will need to hold in escrow nearly $3 billion in 2006 and $36 billion over the 2006-2014 period. S. 2468 would eliminate the requirement that USPS collect and hold these funds in escrow.

Effects on the Unified Budget

S. 2468 would not affect how much the federal government spends on pension or health benefits for USPS retirees. However, by increasing how much the Postal Service pays to finance those benefits and by eliminating the current-law escrow requirements, the bill would increase future budget deficits as measured by the unified federal budget.

Off-budget payments made by the Postal Service for CSRS and FEHB are transfers to on-budget federal accounts, and are counted as offsetting receipts (a credit against direct spending). Eliminating the USPS transfer to CSRS for military service credits would reduce on-budget offsetting receipts by $13.5 billion over the 2005-2014 period. Under the bill, that reduction would be offset by a $33.6 billion net increase in on-budget offsetting receipts paid by the Postal Service for the new health benefits fund. Taken together, those provisions would increase on-budget offsetting receipts by $20.2 billion over the 2005-2014 period.

The collection of funds to be held in escrow by the Postal Service is recorded as an off-budget offsetting receipt. Eliminating the requirement to fund the escrow account would allow the USPS to pay down debt, increase spending for capital improvements or other projects, postpone or diminish future rate increases, or some combination of these activities. CBO estimates that this provision would increase net off-budget spending by $36 billion over the 2006-2014 period. (Much of that spending would be to fund the new health benefits payments mentioned above as on-budget offsetting receipts.) Making the costs of the PRC subject to appropriation would reduce direct spending by the Postal Service by about $90 million over the next 10 years. Furthermore, reducing USPS costs for workers' compensation could reduce direct spending by an additional $50 million over the 2005-2014 period.

The combined effect of the $20.2 billion increase in on-budget receipts, the $36 billion reduction in off-budget offsetting receipts, and a $140 million reduction in USPS direct spending would produce a $15.7 billion cost to the unified budget deficit over the 2005-2014 period. Those effects are presented in Table 2 and explained in more detail below.

TABLE 2. ESTIMATED CHANGES IN DIRECT SPENDING FOR S. 2468

	By Fiscal Year, Outlays in Billions of Dollars									
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
CHANGES IN DIRECT SPENDING										
On-Budget Effects										
Civil Service Retirement System	0	2.0	1.9	1.8	1.7	1.5	1.4	1.2	1.1	0.9
Postal Service Retiree Health Benefits Fund net of retiree premium payments to FEHB [a]	0	0.4	-4.2	-4.2	-4.2	-4.2	-4.3	-4.3	-4.3	-4.4
Total On-Budget Effects	0	2.4	-2.3	-2.4	-2.5	-2.7	-2.9	-3.1	-3.3	-3.5
Off-Budget Effects										
Eliminate Escrow Account	0	2.9	3.2	3.5	3.7	3.9	4.3	4.5	4.8	5.2
Funding for PRC Costs Subject to Appropriation and Workers' compensation Savings	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Total Off-Budget Effects	*	2.9	3.2	3.5	3.6	3.9	4.2	4.4	4.8	5.2
Total Unified Budget Effects	*	5.4	0.9	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.4	1.4	1.6	1.7
MEMORANDUM										
Payments from the Postal Service received by PSRHBF	0	0	-5.9	-6.1	-6.4	-6.6	-6.8	-7.1	-7.4	-7.8
FEHB premiums paid from PSRHBF	0	0.4	1.8	2.0	2.2	2.4	2.6	2.8	3.1	3.4
Net outlays of PSRHBF	0	0.4	-4.2	-4.2	-4.2	-4.2	-4.3	-4.3	-4.3	-4.4

NOTES: FEHB = Federal Employees Health Benefits program; PSRHBF = Postal Service Retiree Health Benefits Fund; PRC = Postal Regulatory Commission; USPS = United States Postal Service.

* = savings of less than $50 million.

Components may not add to totals because of rounding.

Amounts in the table represent net changes in offsetting receipts, which are recorded in the budget as changes in direct spending. A positive sign indicates lower offsetting receipts, thus an increase in outlays; negative numbers represent increased offsetting receipts, or a reduction in net outlays.

a. Starting in July 2006, CBO assumes that payments of FEHB premiums for Postal Service retirees would be paid out of the Postal Service Retiree Health Benefits Fund instead of being paid directly by the Postal Service as under current law. S. 2468 would require the first payment prefunding and amortization amounts to be made by January 31, 2007. The bill would have no effect on spending by the FEHB program for health benefits for Postal Service annuitants.

On-Budget Effects (Direct Spending)

CBO estimates the total on-budget effect of the pension and health care provisions in S. 2468 would be a decrease in offsetting receipts of $2.4 billion in 2006, an increase of $4.8 billion over the 2006-2009 period, and $20.2 billion over the 2006-2014 period. That increase in on-budget collections would come from increased transfers (off-budget outlays) coming from the USPS. (The off-budget effects are discussed in the following section.)

Civil Service Retirement Contributions. S. 2468 would change the way the Postal Service finances retirement benefits for current and retired employees. Starting in October 2005, the bill would transfer financial responsibility for military service credits earned by Postal Service employees and retirees participating in CSRS from the Postal Service to the Department of the Treasury. Military service credits represent time served in the U.S. military that is credited toward benefits under the civilian retirement system. Most federal agencies are not responsible for the cost to the pension system of the military service credits incurred by their CSRS employees, but P.L. 108-18 transferred responsibility for military service credits from the Treasury to the Postal Service beginning in June 2004.

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) estimates that transferring responsibility for military service credits from the Postal Service back to the Treasury would cause the Postal Service to have overfunded its obligation to CSRS by about $19.4 billion through September 2005.[2] Consequently, under S. 2468 the Postal Service would no longer be obligated to make either agency contributions or any further annual amortization payments for CSRS. (Employee contributions would continue at 7 percent of basic pay and retirement benefits under CSRS would not change.)

Spending by the Postal Service—including amounts paid into other federal accounts—is considered off-budget spending. However, the Civil Service Retirement and Disability Fund (CSRDF) is an on-budget account, so the amounts the CSRDF collects from the Postal Service are on-budget offsetting receipts. Reducing payments the Postal Service makes to the CSRDF would result in a reduction in off-budget spending and a reduction in on-budget offsetting receipts. CBO estimates transferring responsibility for military service credits, and the attendant reduction in CSRS contributions such a change would bring, would reduce on-budget receipts by $2 billion in 2006 and $13.5 billion over the 2006-2014 period. Although the Treasury Department would then be responsible for the costs associated with those pension liabilities under the bill, the Treasury payment and receipt by CSRDF are both on-budget intragovernmental transactions. That is, the bill would replace one intragovernmental

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2. This overfunding, which is calculated on a net-present-value basis, represents an estimate of the total amount of money the Postal Service will have contributed toward CSRS from 1971 through September 30, 2005, minus the agency's CSRS liabilities if USPS bears no financial responsibility for the pension costs associated with military service credits. The projected overfunding is due primarily to larger-than-expected returns on assets held in the CSRDF.

transfer with another. Instead of a transfer from the off-budget Postal Service to the on-budget CSRDF, there would be a transfer from the Treasurey to the CSRDF.

Postal Service Retiree Health Benefits Fund. S. 2468 also would change the way the Postal Service finances its share of the cost of providing health care to retirees. Instead of directly paying a portion of the health premiums incurred by current retirees each year, the USPS would begin paying for estimated costs of retiree health care as such costs are accrued by current workers. Starting in 2007, S. 2468 would require the USPS to make payments equal to the annual increase in retiree health care liabilities accrued by current employees. These payments would be deposited into a new on-budget account, the Postal Service Retiree Health Benefits Fund (PSRHBF), which would earn interest at the same rate as the CSRDF. The Postal Service's share of health care premiums for current retirees would be paid out of the PSRHBF as soon as adequate funds are available in the account to do so.

Under S. 2468, any overfunding toward CSRS liabilities (after financial responsibility for military service credits reverts to the Treasury) would be transferred from the CSRDF to the PSRHBF by June 30, 2006. Based on information provided by OPM, CBO anticipates that the transfer to the new fund would total $20.2 billion and would occur in June 2006. (This amount reflects the $19.4 billion in estimated CSRS overfunding plus interest that would accrue between the end of the valuation period in September 2005 and when CBO assumes the asset transfer would take place in June 2006.)

Under the bill, the Postal Service also would make annual amortization payments toward the unfunded liabilities for health care costs of both current and future retirees. The unfunded liability would be the difference between the assets held in the PSRHBF and the net present value of accrued liabilities projected for retiree health care. The bill would direct OPM to compute the required prefunding and amortization payments consistent with assumptions and methodologies for financial reporting used by OPM under current law. The bill specifies that payments would be made by January 31st of each year, starting in 2007, for the prior fiscal year. (CBO assumes those payments would include interest accrued between the end of the valuation period and the payment date each year.) Based on information provided by OPM, CBO anticipates the net present value of the unfunded liability for the health care costs of retirees would amount to $43.2 billion at the end of 2006 and would shrink to $39.9 billion by the end of 2014. CBO estimates that payments by the Postal Service for prefunding health care costs of retirees and amortization payments for the remaining unfunded liability would be $5.9 billion in 2007, $18.4 billion over the 2007-2009 period, and $54.2 billion over the 2007-2014 period.

CBO expects that the transfer of $20.2 billion from the CSRDF to the PSRHBF resulting from the shift in responsibility for military service credits would occur in June 2006.

Therefore, the Postal Service would cease making payments under current law for its share of FEHB premiums for annuitants beginning in July 2006; with those premium payments instead being drawn from the PSRHBF. CBO estimates that change in the funding mechanism for retiree health benefits would reduce off-budget payments by the Postal Service for FEHB premiums by $0.4 billion in 2006 (which reflects premium payments, under current law, for the last three months of 2006), $6.3 billion over the 2006-2009 period, and $20.5 billion over the 2006-2014 period. On-budget payments for those amounts would then be transferred from the PSRHBF to the FEHB program to pay the Postal Service's share of health care costs for retirees.

Health premiums paid by the Postal Service for FEHB and any payments that would be made into the new PSRHBF would be considered on-budget offsetting receipts. CBO estimates the increase in on-budget receipts as a result of changes in how the Postal Service finances its health care obligations would be $4.2 billion in 2007, $12.2 billion over the 2007-2009 period, and $33.6 billion over the 2007-2014 period.

Off-Budget Effects (Direct Spending)

CBO estimates that enacting S. 2468 would result in net off-budget costs of $2.9 billion in fiscal year 2006, $13.2 billion over the 2005-2009 period, and $35.8 billion over the 2005-2014 period because it would eliminate the requirement to fund the escrow account, allowing the Postal Service to increase other spending, reduce postal rates, or some combination of these actions. The bill also would make the costs of the PRC subject to appropriation, thus reducing direct spending by about $90 million over the next 10 years. In addition, S. 2468 would reduce USPS payments for workers' compensation, which would reduce direct spending by $50 million over the next 10 years. The bill contains many other provisions that could affect USPS cash flows in each year, but we estimate they would not have a significant net effect on the USPS over the long term.

Elimination of Escrow Fund. P.L. 108-18 permanently reduced payments by the USPS to the CSRDF. As a result of that act, USPS payments to the CSRDF declined by $2.5 billion to $5 billion annually, beginning in 2003. For fiscal years starting in 2006, P.L. 108-18 requires that savings resulting from reduced payments to the CSRDF be considered an operating expense of the Postal Service and held in escrow, remaining unavailable for obligation unless authorized by subsequent legislation.

S. 2468 would amend P.L. 108-18 to eliminate the escrow fund requirement. As a result of this provision, the Postal Service could lower rates and thus reduce its revenues, or maintain rates and increase spending, or some combination of these actions. The net outlays of the

Postal Service would increase because collections would not be deposited in escrow. CBO estimates that eliminating the escrow requirement would increase net spending by about $2.9 billion in 2006, $13.3 billion over the 2006-2009 period, and $36 billion over the 2006-2014 period. Much of the spending would go toward making new payments to the on-budget account for health care costs.

Make Cost of PRC Subject to Appropriation. Under current law, the PRC is funded from the Postal Service Fund without annual Congressional appropriation. This office spent about $8 million in 2003. S. 2468 would authorize the appropriation of such sums as may be necessary from the Postal Service Fund for the PRC. Thus, enacting this legislation would reduce direct spending—and therefore, increase spending subject to appropriation—by about $8 million annually beginning in fiscal year 2005.

Workers' Compensation Costs. The bill would lower workers' compensation payments made by the USPS by reducing an injured postal worker's long-term disability payments when the individual reaches retirement age as defined by the Social Security Act. Based on information provided by the USPS, CBO estimates that these savings would total roughly $50 million over the 2005-2014 period. In addition, CBO estimates that there would be a negligible net savings to the Department of Labor's workers' compensation account, which is on-budget.

Changes to USPS Rate-Setting Procedures. Under the bill the Postal Service would be directed to define the cost basis for the different products and services it supplies. These products and services would broadly be categorized as market-dominant products and competitive products. Different rate-setting procedures would apply to these different categories of products and services.

*Market-Dominant Products***.** Under S. 2468, market-dominant products would include: first-class mail, special services, periodicals, standard mail, media mail, library mail, bound printed matter, single-piece parcel post, and single-piece international mail.

S. 2468 would require the PRC to establish, within one year of enactment, a new system for regulating postage rates for market-dominant products. This new system would include annual limitations on the percentage changes in rates based on inflation-related indices, such as the Consumer Price Index, the Employment Cost Index, or similar measures. Under the legislation, however, these annual limits could be exceeded under extraordinary circumstances.

Later this year we expect the Postal Service to begin preparations for a rate case in 2006. Assuming the PRC would need the full year that the bill would provide to establish the new system for regulating rates for market dominant products, we assume that the new rate setting system would not be effective until after 2006.

Since 1970, increases in postage rates have largely tracked the rate of inflation. Over the past 10 years, rates were increased in 1995, 1999, 2001, and 2002 as a result of rate cases. After 2006, we expect that the Postal Service would increase rates for market-dominant mail services more frequently than under current law, but by smaller increments (as defined by the annual limitation). Over the long term, CBO does not expect that enacting S. 2468 would significantly change the revenues from market-dominant products that the Postal Service would be expected to receive under current law.

Competitive Products. Under S. 2468, competitive products would include the following: priority mail, express mail, mailgrams, bulk international mail, and bulk parcel post. Competitive products currently contribute less than 15 percent of total postal revenues.

S. 2468 would direct the PRC to prohibit subsidizing competitive products by market-dominant products, ensure that each competitive product covers its attributable costs, and ensure that all competitive products collectively cover their share of the institutional costs of the Postal Service. After these requirements have been implemented, the USPS could change rates for competitive products as long as the cost coverage requirements are met and the PRC has reviewed the proposed changes. In addition, the Postal Service would have to provide public notice and justification of changes in rates.

In addition, S. 2468 would require the Postal Service to establish a new off-budget fund, the Competitive Products Fund, solely for revenues and expenditures associated with competitive products. We expect that it could be difficult to differentiate postal expenses related only to competitive products, as USPS uses the same employees and facilities to handle both market dominant and competitive products.

CBO cannot predict the bill's effect on Postal Service revenues from competitive products because the agency could set and change prices with few restrictions, although we would expect that yearly cash flows under the bill would differ from those estimated under current law. CBO also cannot predict how successfully the Postal Service might compete in the open market. However, the highly competitive nature of the mailing industry would tend to keep prices and revenues down, while the labor-intensive cost structure of the USPS would maintain upward pressure on expenses. Thus, over the long term under this legislation, CBO expects the Postal Service to attempt to recover its costs and break even as it did before the enactment of P.L 108-18.

Other Off-Budget Effects. S. 2468 would make many other changes to the laws governing the Postal Service, the PRC, and the delivery of mail and other postal products. Some of these provisions, such as the expansion of USPS contracting authority for the interstate air transportation of mail, would yield savings. Other provisions, including the requirement for numerous additional USPS reports, would increase costs. In total, CBO does not expect the net effects of these provisions to be significant.

Spending Subject to Appropriation

S. 2468 would authorize the appropriation of such sums as may be necessary, out of the Postal Service Fund, for the PRC. (Currently, the Postal Rate Commission is funded out the Postal Service Fund without Congressional action.) Beginning in 2005, this provision would entail about $8 million a year in spending, subject to appropriation of the necessary amounts. Enacting the bill would reduce direct spending by about the same amount. Spending on this activity would likely still be considered off-budget, since funds would come from the Postal Service Fund.

In addition, S. 2468 would require OPM to make actuarial computations related to the CSRS and PSRHBF trust funds and would increase OPM's administrative workload to comply with the requirements under the bill. CBO estimates that such activities would cost less than $500,000 annually, assuming the availability of appropriated funds.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL AND PRIVATE-SECTOR IMPACT

S. 2468 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in UMRA and would impose no costs on state, local, or tribal governments.

PREVIOUS CBO ESTIMATE

On June 23, 2004, CBO transmitted a revised cost estimate for H.R. 4341, the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act, as ordered reported by the House Committee on Government Reform on May 12, 2004. CBO estimates that enacting that legislation would result in on-budget savings of $25.7 billion and off-budget costs of $34.5 billion over the 2005-2014 period, for a net cost to the unified budget of $8.7 billion over that period.

A key difference between S. 2468 and H.R. 4341 concerns how the Postal Service would finance the health care costs of retirees. Both of the bills would require payments to prefund the costs associated with the annual retiree health liabilities accrued by current employees although the proposed payment schedules would differ. H.R. 4341 would require payments for prefunding and interest to be made at the end of each fiscal year, starting in fiscal year 2006. The first payment under S. 2468, however, would be made in fiscal year 2007, and annual payments made in January of each year would reflect estimated costs for the prior fiscal year.

Another important difference between these bills concerns how they address the unfunded liabilities for the health care costs of current and future retirees. H.R. 4341 would require the Postal Service to pay annual interest costs on the unfunded liability, while S. 2468 would require USPS to make amortization payments toward that liability. Also, H.R. 4341 would require a minimum level of prefunding by the Postal Service, net of premium disbursement from the PSRHBF. S. 2468 does not include a similar provision.

H.R. 4341 also would authorize the appropriation of such sums as may be necessary for the USPS Office of Inspector General. Thus, CBO estimated that implementing H.R. 4341 would cost about $1.6 billion over the 2005-2014 period, assuming appropriation of the necessary amounts, and an equivalent amount of off-budget direct spending savings over that period.

In addition, H.R. 4341 did not reduce USPS costs for workers' compensation, and the cost estimates reflect that difference.

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