

# Make this election count with health care reform



*William H. Young*

**L**ast month, I wrote about the need to make this election count for something. We can't be happy just to elect pro-letter carrier and pro-union candidates. And it will not be enough to elevate public officials whose only virtue is their lack of hostility toward working people and their unions. We need leaders who are prepared to act aggressively to rebuild the middle class and to bolster the long-term viability of the United States Postal Service.

What does that mean in practical terms? First, it means a commitment to fight for enactment of the Employee Free Choice Act. Without a strengthened labor movement, all the negative trends of the past three decades will persist—stagnant wages, the continued export of good jobs, and the loss of pensions and health insurance coverage. For letter carriers, these trends pose a direct threat to our standard of living: NALC does not operate in a vacuum, nor does it bargain in one. For American households, these trends threaten our ability to build strong families with healthy children and undermine our efforts to foster good citizens and caring communities that embrace what President Lincoln called the “better angels of our nature.” Those better angels cherish the values of solidarity, decency, fairness and justice.

**But we have to fight for more than a** stronger labor movement. We have to fight for the benefit of all American workers, union and non-union alike. And the best place to start is to address the most important source of insecurity in American life—the skyrocketing cost of health insurance and the growing problem of uninsured and under-insured American citizens. That's why NALC is making health care reform the second pillar of the campaign to mobilize our members to vote for change in the November elections.

Just as we have joined with the rest of the labor movement to promote the Million Member Mobilization to win passage of the Employee Free Choice Act next year, we have also embraced the AFL-CIO's Health Care Campaign. Our goal is to use the next

several months to educate our members and voters in union households, as well as candidates seeking office, about the undeniable need to address the health care crisis in America.

Over the past eight years, the number of uninsured has grown relentlessly as the slow-motion collapse of the employer-provided health insurance continues. At the same time, costs have increased by more than 75 percent at a time when wages have barely grown at all in real terms. Letter carriers and the Postal Service, like many other workers and their employers, are paying for the uninsured as the cost of uncompensated care is passed on to a declining number of insured workers. That burden shows up in higher premiums for plans in which we enroll. At the same time, as taxpayers, we are picking up a large share of these costs as well, through Medicaid, S-CHIP and other public programs.

**Our health care financing system is** grossly inequitable—the Postal Service pays its fair share while companies such as Wal-Mart shift these costs to others or to public programs. How can it do that? By using any means necessary to prevent its workers from organizing a union to fight for decent pay and benefits. That's right; it takes us straight back to Part 1 of this story—the need to make the Employee Free Choice Act the law of the land.

So there you have it, brothers and sisters. Our two main targets for making this election matter are inextricably linked. We need EFCA and we need universal health care. Those are things that are worth fighting for.

Fortunately, we have all the tools we need to make it happen in 2008. We have COLCPE, which we will use to support candidates who embrace our values. We have the Carrier Corps, which we will use to turn out the vote for our friends in both parties. And we have our e-Activist Network, which gives us the ability to mobilize our strength in numbers at a moment's notice. Are you ready? I am. Let's get started. ☒