

Keeping focus as pieces of the puzzle fall in place



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We all waited eagerly for the President's Commission on the Postal Service to issue its report in July, and responses came quickly from almost every corner of the postal community. NALC, along with the other postal unions, spoke up about the attacks on collective bargaining. The mailers weighed in with their views on rate-setting and regulatory oversight. Key members of Congress raised other issues of concern. However, one key player in the debate did not make its views known immediately—the United States Postal Service.

Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME), the chair of the Governmental Affairs Committee, has embarked on a series of hearings to gather recommendations from all of the stakeholders about the future of the Postal Service. We look forward to being invited to testify in the next few months. As we understand it, Sen. Collins is doing all of this with an eye toward drafting bipartisan postal reform legislation along with Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE).

At the most recent Senate hearing Postmaster General Jack Potter spoke up. Having heard his comments I can now say with confidence that things are moving in the right general direction. We all know that the NALC and the Postal Service don't always see eye-to-eye, and we will not shy away from speaking up when our interests are being compromised. But there is a lot of common ground in the Postmaster General's initial response to the Commission's report. In fact, the word from the Postal Service is that any legislative reform must be drafted with the active input of the postal unions. This is very good news from the Postmaster General. It is clear he understands that the unions of the employees who serve USPS are essential players that will champion the organization's continued vitality.

As I have noted in this space in the past, the number one concern we have about the Commission's report is the recommendations on collective bargaining. On the key issue of whether a politically appointed board should be empowered to set limits on our pay and benefits, the Postmaster General agreed

with the NALC that such a system would effectively destroy the collective bargaining process. His comments were echoed by the hearing's other witness, Comptroller General David Walker of the General Accounting Office, Congress' research and investigative arm.

While we have been talking about postal reform for nearly a decade, it is important to note that this process is still in its early stages and will take at least several months to play out. With all of the key stakeholders (unions, mailers and the Postal Service) having spoken up against the most egregious Commission recommendations on collective bargaining, it would seem that those issues are now off the table.

However, there are still some potentially damaging proposals that loom large. For example, at the recent hearing both the Postmaster General and the Comptroller General suggested that newly hired postal employees should not have access to the same congressionally guaranteed benefits enjoyed by current active and retired postal employees. And the Postal Service has made some suggestions for changes in the collective bargaining process that we neither seek nor desire. These are issues that will have to be worked out over time if we are to achieve postal reform.

To succeed in moving complicated legislation such as postal reform, we must focus on the areas of agreement instead of harping on the divisive issues. As members of Congress begin to focus on postal reform, they will shy away from advocating a bill on which the key stakeholders cannot find common ground.

In the end, postal reform must be achieved if we hope to save both the Postal Service and our livelihoods. That is why NALC has been reaching out over the last several months, getting together not only with the other employee organizations but with key players in the mailing industry. Now that the Postal Service has made its views known, we can all begin to move forward together. The pieces of the postal reform puzzle are starting to come together, and there is reason to be optimistic about what the future will bring. ☒