

Standing strong for our vision of the USPS against any blowback



Fredric V. Rolando

Thanks to the thousands of NALC activists who wrote or telephoned their members of Congress, recruited community allies for the March 24th rallies and generally mobilized the public to fight plans to dismantle the Postal Service, we scored a key victory in April.

After Congress adopted a continuing resolution to fund the government through the rest of the current fiscal year (ending Sept. 30, 2013) that maintains the decades-old mandate on the Postal Service to provide six-day mail delivery, Postmaster General Pat Donahoe refused to say whether he would follow through on his earlier threat to ignore the will of Congress and

implement the move to five-day service in August. Fortunately, the Postal Service's Board of Governors decided on April 10 to back down on the PMG's threat and wisely decided to obey the law, responding to the public outcry we generated and following the legal advice issued by the Government Accountability Office (GAO).

Of course, this is but a small victory and the bar was set very low for the Board of Governors—they don't deserve a lot of praise for simply following the law—but I was willing to give credit where credit was due. Then I read the Board's statement announcing its decision.

It seems the Board (perhaps following the lead of the PMG) is not content to accept the will of Congress and let the democratic process work to decide the future of the Postal Service. Instead, it decided to engage in a bit of payback.

The Board directed the postmaster general to seek to reopen the Postal Service's labor contracts with its unions just weeks after we received the Das arbitration award. It also called on the Postal Service to request rate hikes on newspapers and periodical mailers. What connects these two actions? Both are directed at parties that have most strongly resisted the PMG's disastrous "shrink to survive" business strategy.

We expect any day now to receive a letter from the postmaster general asking us to renegotiate our contract. This is insulting because we just finished the interest arbitration process three months ago that was forced on us by postal management, which decided to end negotiations and invoke the impasse procedures. Perhaps they regret ending the negotiations. But we are under no obligation to re-open our labor contract.

Additionally, this is unnecessary because it's not too late for management to return to the bargaining table: The new contract provides several mechanisms for ongoing negotiations to reduce health care expenses, improve the route adjustment process, and increase revenues. USPS should acknowledge those mechanisms rather than grandstand for the media and other audiences. Letter carriers and other postal employees have already made huge sacrifices over the past few years. Now it is time for legislative action to address the crisis at the Postal Service.

The blowback from our firm defense of six-day delivery—and from our support for real postal reform that will strengthen the Postal Service and not dismantle it—did not end with the Board of Governors. The PMG's allies in Congress and the media have attacked our efforts to save Saturday delivery as the pleadings of special interests seeking to thwart common-sense changes in postal operations in the face of technological change.

Of course, these folks never acknowledge that pre-funding is the main source of the Postal Service's financial losses, including more than 90 percent of the reported loss so far in 2013. I've responded to dozens of error-filled editorials in recent weeks and will answer our congressional critics when I testify before a House committee on April 17 (which will be reported in the next issue of *The Postal Record*).

Willful ignorance and strong ideological biases against public employees and public institutions cannot be allowed to distort the debate over the future of our employer. But even more important, we must offer an alternative vision for a strong and viable Postal Service for the 21st century. That is what we will be focusing on in the weeks and months ahead.

Our recent success points the way forward. This spring, using a targeted and sophisticated media strategy and a huge grassroots network of activists, we successfully framed the choice for Congress: Should we cut Saturday delivery, or should we enact real reform that addresses the true causes of the postal financial crisis? The coalition we have built convinced enough senators and representatives to think twice before degrading our last-mile delivery network.

Now, we must employ that coalition to make the case for a fundamental reform of the governance structure of the Postal Service as well as financial reforms we have advocated. The Board of Governors and the postmaster general have clearly demonstrated by their actions that we need new executive leadership capable of developing and executing a new vision for the United States Postal Service. With your help, we can define that vision and make it happen.