

Where the candidates stand on our issues



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In this space in February, I outlined our approach to the 2020 general election. My column laid out our process for our endorsement of a presidential candidate this year, while noting that political activism raises a dilemma for us. On the one hand, no group of workers has more at stake in federal elections than federal and postal workers, so we must be involved in the democratic process—our jobs, our benefits and our standard of living depend on it. On the other hand, the diversity of political views in our membership fully reflects the diversity of political opinion in our country—from left to right and everywhere in between.

We solve that dilemma and stay united by focusing only on the issues that affect letter carriers at work and acknowledge that every member will make his or her own voting decisions. In other words, while we don't presume to tell any member how to vote, we aim to inform our members regarding the policies and positions of the candidates that affect our interests as postal workers. And we use the resources voluntarily donated by our members to the Letter Carrier Political Fund to elect the candidates, regardless of party, who support letter carriers and a strong U.S. Postal Service.

As I promised in February, this month we are publishing the responses to our candidate questionnaires and asking you to weigh in with your presidential preferences by participating in our postcard poll. I was expecting to publish a very large issue of our magazine this month, in terms of pages, but only two survey responses are published in this issue because so many candidates dropped out of the race over the first six weeks of the primary season.

The good news is that both former Vice President Joe Biden and Sen. Bernie Sanders passed our candidate survey test with flying colors. As you will see from their answers to our questionnaire on pages 6-17, both strongly support our interests on virtually every major issue—from repealing the pre-funding mandate and maintaining six-day and door delivery to preserving our collective-bargaining rights.

The bad news is that President Trump declined to answer our questionnaire. This is very disappointing, but not totally surprising given that his positions on our issues have been pretty atrocious. So in light of his refusal to respond, I will lay out President Trump's record on letter carrier issues and Postal Service policies. In 2018, his Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued a

report calling for the privatization of the Postal Service—a policy that would destroy the most efficient and affordable universal postal system in the world. The president also created the Task Force on the United States Postal System that produced one of the sloppiest, most error-filled and misguided reports we've ever seen. Its legislative and administrative recommendations amounted to an all-out assault on the Postal Service and its employees. For our purposes, we can treat the task force report as President Trump's answer to our candidate questionnaire. Let's review his "answers" on the issues most important for our jobs.

First, he supports stripping us of our collective-bargaining rights. Yes, brothers and sisters, on the 50th anniversary of the Great Postal Strike of 1970, the president of the United States has called for taking away our right to negotiate our pay and terms and conditions with postal management. That is an insult to each of us and to the heroes of 1970. Second, the task force report called for giving the postmaster general the authority to discontinue Saturday and door delivery service—steps that would divert business from the Postal Service to private competitors and unnecessarily eliminate tens of thousands of letter carrier jobs. Third, rather than allow the Postal Service to offer new services and grow, the administration calls for more downsizing as well as outsourcing work from career employees to private contractors—i.e., low-wage, non-union workers. Fourth, the report advocates redefining the Postal Service's universal service obligation to cover only so-called "essential" mail—a small and ill-defined subset of current letter mail volume made up of personal communications, prescription drugs and transactions mail. This would exclude the "commercial mail" that makes up the bulk of what we deliver today, effectively deregulating mail delivery by shrinking the monopoly that makes affordable universal service possible. Taking into account this track record, the administration's relentless attacks on the U.S. labor movement, and its reflexive support of big business over workers on regulatory and judicial matters, we know as much about President Trump as we would have had he honestly completed our questionnaire.

For carriers who base voting decisions on workplace and postal issues, this is the information we have on the three remaining major candidates in the race.

As I indicated in February, the results of our issues survey of the candidates and our member postcard poll will be just two of the factors that will guide our decision-making surrounding an endorsement in this year's election. We also will consider their electability, experience and relationship with our union.

Our goals for the 2020 elections are to elect a pro-letter carrier majority in both houses of Congress and give them a partner in the White House who is a strong supporter of strengthening the Postal Service for the 21st Century—all while keeping our union united and strong.