A time to remember

Lew Drass

Some of you will already have voted by the time you read this. Others already have made up their mind about whom they plan to vote for this election season, and there is nothing anyone could say to change that. That is just fine with me. I believe in everybody's right to their political opinion. I learned that best in the decades I spent on the workroom floor. Politics are argued nearly every day at work, along with religion, sports and a host of other issues.

I have always voted based on my job. Maybe that is wrong to some of you, but I always have believed that it was in the best interests of my family, which includes every member of NALC and their families. This year is no different for me. My decision is easy, and here is why.

The current administration has submitted White House budgets to Congress each year since Donald Trump has taken office as president. Each year, they have proposed several provisions that would hurt each one of us and cause us to:

- **Pay more—**Increase pension contributions to the tune of about $3,700 per year for anyone hired before Jan. 1, 2014, which boils down to around a $1.75 per hour pay cut for most of you.
- **Work longer—**Eliminate the Social Security Annuity Supplement. This would eliminate the annuity supplement that covers the gap for employees who retire under the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) before they qualify for Social Security benefits at age 62.
- **Earn less when you retire—**Reduce Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) and FERS pension benefits for new retirees by basing annuities on workers' highest average yearly salary over five years (high-5) instead of over the highest three years (high-3). This will naturally reduce the amount that you will draw each month in retirement.
- **Earn less while you work—**Reduce the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) G Fund interest rate. The new rate would be tied to the interest rate on 90-day Treasury bills instead of an average of medium- and long-term Treasury bond rates. This would have translated into a $1.4 billion annual loss for TSP participants last year alone.
- **Lose more money after retirement—**Eliminate or reduce cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs). For current and future retirees under FERS (which covers any employee hired after 1984), COLAs would be entirely eliminated. For those retirees under CSRS, COLAs would be reduced by 0.5 percent each year.

The most recent two White House budget proposals also included:

- **Pay higher health benefit premiums—**Reduce the percentage that the federal government is required to contribute to the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program, so that federal employees pay more into the program. It is estimated that this change would cost an average retiree around $1,400 per year. This change would not affect active letter carriers immediately because the percentage the USPS pays for our health benefit premiums is set by the terms of our collective-bargaining agreement.

The 2019 White House budget proposal also called for $44.49 billion in vaguely defined service cuts and revenue changes over a decade, including reducing service days and making door delivery a thing of the past.

President Trump established a task force to evaluate the operations and finances of the USPS and develop recommendations for administrative and legislative reforms for the Postal Service when he signed Executive Order 13829 on April 12, 2018.

The task force report was released on Dec. 4, 2018. It was titled "United States Postal Service: A Sustainable Path Forward." Here are a few recommendation excerpts from the report:

> Align USPS employee rights with other federal employee rights by eliminating collective bargaining over compensation for USPS employees.
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> Pursue reforms to USPS employee wages consistent with those proposed for the broader federal workforce in the President's Management Agenda.
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> The Task Force recommends that the USPS explore franchising the mailbox as a means of generating revenue. This could be done by retaining the mailbox monopoly and allowing regulated access, for a fee, to certified private companies. These "franchisees" would be granted access to the mailbox for the delivery of mail and small parcels.
>
> Pursue reform of the Federal Employee Retirement System that would increase employee contributions and move toward a defined contribution system.

There is much more. The report should have been titled "A Recipe to Dismantle the USPS."

The USPS Fairness Act (H.R. 2382) passed in the House on Feb. 5 this year by a vote of 309-106. This bill would repeal the unfair requirement that the Postal Service pre-fund retiree health benefit premiums. This is a burden that no other business in the federal or private sector is required to carry, and accounts for 92 percent of the reported USPS losses from 2007 to 2018. Additionally, the Delivering for America Act (H.R. 8015) passed in the House of Representatives on Aug. 22 by a vote of 257-150. This bill provides $25 billion in direct financial relief to the Postal Service and would ensure that no changes in service can be made that would result in delays during the pandemic. These bills would go a long way to provide the relief we need.

In the end, you will have to make up your own mind, but whatever you do, please remember to vote.