

# What's at stake for letter carriers in the 2020 elections



**Letter carriers aren't used** being the center of attention in elections.

We do our jobs each day and the American public appreciates what we do, but rarely is the U.S. Postal Service a central issue in political debates. In this crucial election year, that has changed. Congress has debated postal legislation and held emergency hearings on the Postal Service. Americans are holding rallies and protests in support of the Postal Service and its mission. Every day brings new stories in the media about USPS. Both presidential candidates frequently mention USPS and mail delivery. However, their messages about the Postal Service couldn't be more different, and these messages show what is at stake in this election for USPS and for letter carriers.

Along with being a major issue, the Postal Service—and letter carriers—will play an essential electoral role by delivering millions of ballots, as nearly every state has made it easier for its residents to vote by mail, and as many Americans seek to avoid standing in line at polling stations during a pandemic.

With the Postal Service a central political topic, the NALC Executive Council had much to consider when it made a decision on endorsing a presidential ticket. The Executive Council voted unanimously to endorse former Vice President Joe Biden and Sen. Kamala Harris for president and vice president, respectively.

The Executive Council's decision to endorse the Biden-Harris ticket was based on the input of NALC's membership through two types of poll-

ing and responses to our candidate questionnaire. In the postcard poll conducted by distributing preference cards in *The Postal Record* for members to mail back to us, members preferred Biden over President Donald Trump by a ratio greater than 2-1 (58.4 percent versus 26.6 percent). A scientific poll conducted for us by Hart Research found similar results.

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The Council also evaluated the candidates on issues that affect letter carriers and the Postal Service, taking into consideration the candidates' records, statements and responses to the questionnaire we sent to all campaigns. It did not consider unrelated matters such as social issues or foreign policy, nor did it take party affiliation into account.

Using this information, the choice was clear.

Biden is a fierce ally and defender of USPS, letter carriers, and our postal brothers and sisters. NALC's endorsement and our support come down to Biden's steadfast support on postal issues and his unwavering dedication to improving the lives of working people throughout the country.

Since being elected in 2016 to represent California in the Senate, Harris has put letter carriers and working families first. In her role on the Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, which has jurisdiction over postal and federal issues, she

has staunchly worked for a healthy, financially stable Postal Service and has consistently acted to ensure that those who run the Postal Service are held to the highest standard.

Biden and Harris exhibit the experience, dedication, thoughtfulness and steady hands that will work to protect letter carriers and working families.

Despite our best efforts and just as it did in 2016, the Trump campaign once again did not respond to our repeated outreach. While the president's campaign showed no interest in engaging NALC members on why we should support him, his actions with regard to the Postal Service and letter carriers clearly demonstrate his views.

## **A stark choice in trying times**

With the Postal Service at center stage this year, both presidential nominees, Democrat Joe Biden and Republican Donald Trump, have shared their views on the Postal Service and its employees, supplying a wealth of factors for letter carriers to use in reaching their decisions.

Trump has shown frequent contempt for the Postal Service, calling it a “loser” and a “joke.” As the COVID-19 pandemic engulfed the country and more states turned to the mail to allow voters to cast their ballots safely, Trump lashed out at the idea. Using outrageous and unsubstantiated claims, Trump angrily denigrated the vote-by-mail process as unreliable and vulnerable to corruption. He often claimed that voting by mail invites widespread fraud; tweeting, for example, “Mail boxes will be robbed,

ballots will be forged & even illegally printed out & fraudulently signed.”

It should be noted that Trump himself applied for a vote-by-mail ballot for this fall’s election.

President Trump also opposed appropriating emergency funds to assist the Postal Service, as Congress has done for many other sectors of the economy to help them survive the impact of the pandemic-related economic shutdown. He threatened to veto legislation that contained postal relief funding.

In sharp contrast, former Vice President Biden repeatedly has defended the Postal Service and its employees, supported additional financial aid for USPS during the pandemic and called out Trump’s “sabotage” of the mail. Biden supports assuring that postal employees have the protective gear they need during the pandemic.

Indeed, the Trump administration’s hostility toward the Postal Service and its workers predates the pandemic. The White House established a postal task force on the future of the Postal Service.

In its report, submitted in December of 2018, the task force’s proposals were couched as a plan to “save” the Postal Service, but the details reflected a bid to dismantle the agency.

Notably, the Trump task force called for eliminating our right to collectively bargain our wages and other terms of employment.

“Yes, brothers and sisters, on the 50th anniversary of the Great Postal Strike of 1970, the president of the United States has called for tak-

ing away our right to negotiate our pay and terms and conditions with postal management,” NALC President Fredric Rolando wrote. “That is an insult to each of us and to the heroes of 1970.”

The task force went on to call for allowing the Postal Service to cut six-day and door delivery, outsourcing some postal jobs to private contractors (likely employing non-union workers and paying lower wages), forcing the Postal Regulatory Commission to dramatically increase the cost of “commercial” mail and shipping, and degrading the Postal Service’s universal service obligation to cover only a narrow band of so-called “essential mail.”

Riddled with flaws from simple errors to faulty assumptions, the task force’s recommendations, if implemented, would result in massive service cuts to customers and in reduced business because of steep price increases, as well as in the likely loss of affordable package delivery in rural areas and economically stressed urban communities. In short, it would make things far worse

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for almost everyone—the Postal Service, its employees and the American people—with the possible exception of some of the Postal Service’s private competitors.

The Trump administration’s hostility to federal workers also was evident in the proposed budgets the president

has sent to Congress during his term. They consistently called for deep cuts to federal workers’ pay and benefits, including some cuts to postal employee benefits. For the most part, Congress rejected those proposals.

## **A clear difference**

In stark contrast to Trump’s attacks on the Postal Service and its employees, Biden not only has made his support for USPS and postal workers clear in his public statements, he also has expressed emphatic backing for a strong USPS and the rights of its employees in the questionnaire NALC sent to the candidates.

In his responses, Biden expressed support for six-day and door delivery, for maintaining the Postal Service’s universal service obligation, for providing financial services through USPS, and for ending the mandate to pre-fund retiree health care costs. “It is essential to remove the pre-funding mandate in order to successfully plan for the future of USPS,” he wrote.

Biden also backed voting by mail: “Voting is the purest, most fundamental act of citizenship,” he wrote. “We must strengthen our democracy by guaranteeing that every American’s vote is protected. We’ve got to make it easier—not harder—for Americans to exercise their right to

vote, regardless of their ZIP code or the color of their skin, and make sure we count every voter’s voice equally.”

Biden also came out strongly for unions and collective bargaining.

“Rebuilding the middle class starts with one word: unions,” Biden wrote. “Strong unions built the great Ameri-

can middle class. Everything that defines what it means to live a good life and know you can take care of your family—the 40-hour work week, paid leave, health care protections, a voice in your workplace—is because of workers who organized unions and fought for worker protections. As president, I’ll encourage union organizing and collective bargaining. And I’ll make sure every American has a fair shot at the American Dream, regardless of race, gender, income, or ZIP code. I believe in our founders’ ideals: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal....’ We’ve never fully lived up to them, but we’ve never quit trying. And I’m not about to let us quit trying now.”

In her time as a senator, Harris also has been a close ally of letter carriers. As a member of the committee of jurisdiction, she has worked closely with NALC. Harris is a co-sponsor of the Postal Service Emergency Assistance Act, which would provide a \$25 billion appropriation to help the Postal Service weather the pandemic.

The Democratic Party platform for 2020 reflects the Biden-Harris ticket’s strong backing of the Postal Service. On page 53, it states:

*The U.S. Postal Service (USPS) is the world’s most efficient mail carrier, and Democrats are wholly committed to supporting a public USPS. We will fight all efforts to privatize the USPS and will work to ensure the USPS is financially sustainable, including by repealing the mandate that the agency “pre-fund” retiree health costs. Democrats will protect*

*the Postal Service’s universal service obligation as a core American value and maintain six-day and doorstep delivery mail delivery, which is a lifeline for rural Americans. We will also support new revenue streams for*

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*the USPS, including allowing secure shipping of alcoholic beverages by mail and exploring options to enable unbanked and underbanked Americans to access financial services through the Postal Service.*

The GOP did not write a new platform this year; the Trump-Pence ticket is running on the same GOP platform it adopted in 2016, word for word. That platform, of course, makes no mention of COVID-19, the economic crisis or the challenges that face the Postal Service this year—it ignores the Postal Service entirely—but it does carry over a call to cut federal employee pay and benefits.

“With so much information about each side pointing in opposite directions, the choice is very clear,” Rolando said.

**‘We hold democracy in our hands’**

As we have seen so often in the past, elections have consequences.

This election could determine how the Postal Service operates through the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, and whether its vital role in serving our nation continues.

“We must do everything we can to help the Postal Service thrive, not only for the men and women of the Postal Service, but for the communities and businesses we serve during this critical time,” President Rolando said.

NALC recognizes that our union consists of members holding diverse views and that members take a variety of factors into account in determining their vote. The endorsement is meant to provide information for members about how the choice will affect their jobs, pay, benefits and working conditions, and about how it will affect the future of the Postal Service and its role in our democracy and our shared future.

The stakes have never been higher, and that’s why NALC urges every member of the union to cast a vote in this crucial election. Every vote counts: in the presidential race, in contests for the Senate and the House of Representatives, and in races for state and local offices. In many cases, the margin of votes that decides the winner could be very slim.

“I urge every letter carrier to vote in this fall’s election,” Rolando said. “This year, just by doing our jobs, we quite literally will hold democracy in our hands. We will carry millions of ballots to the homes of American voters, safe at home, and then carry their completed ballots to election officials to be counted. We should all fulfill the promise of democracy by casting our own votes as well.” **PR**

# The success of vote-by-mail

**A**s the 2020 presidential election draws ever closer and as we continue to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, the ability to vote by mail never has been more important. To stay safe, more Americans than usual are likely to cast ballots using the mail, and states are enacting changes to make that easier. With these changes, 83 percent of American voters are eligible to cast their votes by mail in the general election.

Twenty-one states have made a change this cycle to accommodate voting by mail by either not requiring an excuse in the requesting of a ballot, or by sending a ballot to every registered voter. Twenty-nine states made no changes to their current system; nine of those states (California, Colorado; Hawaii, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Vermont and Washington) plus the District of Columbia will send every registered voter a ballot by mail this fall. The other 20 states will continue to allow absentee voting without any “excuse.” Of the states that do require an approved excuse, several have either waived the requirement this year or have permitted concerns about the pandemic as a reason to vote by mail.

The Postal Service’s role in U.S. elections goes far beyond the distribution of mail ballots. The 8,500 election boards that oversee and conduct our elections rely on the Postal Service for the entire process. They use the mail to register voters, certify candidates, provide voter guides, distribute sample ballots, notify citizens of their polling places and to inform voters of their early voting options.

Meanwhile, candidates, parties, civic groups and organizations of

all kinds use the Post Office to disseminate information and campaign literature—a function that has taken on added importance this election cycle, since physical canvassing has been difficult.

And, as America’s 210,000 city letter carriers did during the presidential primaries this year—when about half of all votes cast involved mailed-out ballots—we intend to meet the challenges of serving the country’s voters and election boards during the current public health crisis.

## A joint solution

At NALC President Fredric Rolando’s initial meeting with Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, Rolando suggested convening a joint labor-management task force to meet the challenges posed by the COVID-19 virus with regard to the handling of election mail.

Meetings of the joint task force on election mail began the week of Sept. 7. Members have been working to establish messaging and protocols ahead of the Nov. 3 election to ensure that every ballot that is in the possession of the Postal Service on Election Day is counted to assure the public and our election board partners that they can rely on the Postal Service to deliver exceptional service.

## Letter carriers deliver

As letter carriers already know, USPS has the capacity to deliver. In 2016, 139 million Americans voted in the general election, with nearly a quarter of those (32 million) voting via mailed-out ballots. This year, total turnout has the potential to surpass 150 million voters, and vote-

by-mail volume could more than double.

Although millions of Americans drop off their ballots in person (in drop boxes, at polling places or at voting centers), millions of others return their ballots by mail. For some, this has raised questions about whether the Postal Service has the capacity to deliver such a high volume of ballots. However, even if every U.S. voter returned his or her ballot by mail, the Postal Service has more than enough capacity to deliver the extra volume.

Consider these facts:

- In 2019, the Postal Service delivered an average of 470 million pieces per day, six days a week—and scaled up to deliver more than 650 million pieces of mail per day during the peak holiday period in December.
- With the current economy depressed by the coronavirus pandemic, USPS is delivering between 350 million and 400 million pieces of mail per day, meaning that it has considerable excess capacity to handle any surge in mail volume.
- There have been neither layoffs nor any kind of downsizing of our processing or delivery networks during the crisis. So, barring any adverse decisions by postal management, the Postal Service can meet any increased demand for political mailings and mail ballots.

Indeed, the Postal Service affirmed its capability in an Aug. 3 statement: “The Postal Service has ample capacity to adjust our nationwide processing and delivery network to meet projected Election and Political Mail volume, including any additional

volume that may result as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Although the recession and the public health crisis have reduced Postal Service letter mail revenues and raised its costs for personal protective equipment and other safety measures, USPS cash reserves more than suffice to permit uninterrupted services through the election. Meanwhile, Congress is debating proposals to appropriate funds to the Postal Service to help it weather the negative economic impact of the pandemic.

## USPS election mail protocols

The Postal Service always has given election mail priority treatment, and USPS has well-established protocols in place for handling election mail.

In addition, USPS has a National Election Mail team based in Washington, DC that oversees a network of state and local election mail coordinators who work with election boards. They help design mailed ballots, aiming to speed delivery by encouraging the use of Intelligent Mail Barcodes and special visual identifiers that improve mailed ballot visibility in the mail stream. This allows election boards as well as voters to identify and track ballots, and they improve the public’s confidence in the vote-by-mail process.

During every election cycle, USPS distributes an official election mail tool kit to election boards and maintains a special website for local and state election officials to report election mail concerns directly to the Postal Service, allowing a rapid response team to resolve such concerns. It also conducts training for employees who come into contract with election mail and monitors its service



performance for election mail, aiming to surpass its normal 96 percent on-time goal for First Class mail delivery.

Earlier this year, the Postal Service affirmed its commitment to deliver any mailed ballot back to its destination election board, even if it does not have proper postage.

## Ballot safety and security

Voters can have confidence in vote-by-mail, both in how the Postal Service handles ballots and how election boards manage the process.

Within USPS, protecting the sanctity of the mail, regardless of the type of mail, is the highest priority. Tampering with any piece of mail—including ballots—is strictly prohibited. USPS even polices its commitment to mail security with an internal security workforce, the Postal Inspection Service.

As a result, the Postal Service is among the most trusted companies in the United States when it comes to protecting privacy, and it is by far the public’s favorite agency in the federal government, with an approval rating of 91 percent.

Election boards also have developed methods to reduce the possibility of voter fraud with mail ballots. Such fraud is exceedingly rare, according to data compiled by the Heritage Foundation. In most states, there are more security checks on mail-in votes than on in-person votes.

When it comes to ballot security, there is no discernable difference between “mail-in” ballots and “absentee” ballots. Ballots mailed to all registered voters, like those sent to voters who have applied for absentee ballots, are handled with the same strict security protocols.

## A lasting legacy

The United States Postal Service, founded in 1775, is one of America’s greatest public institutions and is indispensable to our democracy. Starting during the Civil War, Americans have used the mail to vote, and the Post Office has been essential to our system of elections ever since. Voters can count on the Postal Service and its employees to honor that heritage in November. **PR**