

COLCPE: The 'can do' answer to the Oh-Ohs



Americans can't seem to agree on anything right now, so it's no surprise we can't decide what to call the decade that just ended. The aughts? The double-O's? (My favorite is the Oh-Ohs.) Whatever name ultimately sticks, in truth it was the Lost Decade, at least when it comes to workers and the economy.

The Labor Department recently reported that there was no net jobs growth between 1999 and 2009. Zero. Over the prior six decades, the number of jobs grew by at least 20 percent per decade, often surpassing population growth dramatically. Worse, middle-income households earned less in 2008 than they did in 1999, and the numbers surely worsened in 2009 with the Great Recession.

How we fell into such a deep economic hole is a long and complicated story with plenty of blame to go around. Both political parties are implicated and the misguided policies that helped spawn the disastrous Oh-Ohs go back decades. But the three most important causes were the financial deregulation that turned Wall Street into a sleazy casino, the mindless drive for "free trade" that destroyed America's manufacturing base, and corporate America's all-out assault on unions and union organizing.

Recovering from the economic meltdown and rebuilding the middle class will take a long time. It will require sustained political and legislative action over many years and through many Congresses. That means NALC must patiently and persistently mobilize its members to influence events in Washington.

That is the message of this issue of *The Postal Record*. Every February, we recognize the quiet heroes of the NALC—the members who step up to the plate every pay period and contribute to COLCPE, our political action committee. Their support of the Committee on Letter Carrier Political Education gives the union the resources to fight for letter carriers in the halls of Congress and in the offices of the White House complex.

COLCPE and the political activism it funds

are absolutely crucial to what we do, whether we are defending our health and pension benefits from budget cut proposals that are sure to come as we confront the staggering deficits caused by the tax cuts, wars and financial meltdowns of the past 10 years, or battling to preserve letter carrier jobs from downsizing plans cooked up by misguided managers or political enemies.

Five dollars per pay period—our "Gimme 5" goal—is a small price for the political and legislative insurance provided by COLCPE. Yet just 7 percent of our membership make automatic contributions. That means an astounding 93 percent do not. At such a perilous time in the history of the country and the Postal Service, everyone should do their part.

I have heard all the excuses. On the right, there are conservative members who say we never support Republicans—which is not true. We contribute campaign funds to and mobilize get-out-the-vote efforts for pro-carrier candidates of both parties. On the left, some liberal members are deeply disappointed by the pending health care reform and think pro-labor majorities in the House and Senate, and even President Obama, have failed during the administration's first year to deliver the real change they promised.

But the shortcomings of our elected leaders and our political system do not excuse failure to contribute at least something to COLCPE. I am disappointed, too. I am disappointed that so few Republicans strongly defend the USPS and its employees. I am disappointed that archaic rules in the Senate and the power of corporate special interests are blocking labor law reform.

But that does not mean we should give up. We still need to rebuild the middle class. We still need to safeguard the future of the Postal Service. We still need to turn this country around. Instead of "can't do," let's focus on what we can do—elect more pro-letter carrier candidates from both parties.

Building an ever-larger, bipartisan, pro-worker majority in Congress is COLCPE's purpose. At the end of the day, that's the only way we can escape from the depths of the Lost Decade, whatever we call it. ☒