

It's not too late for the 111th Congress to do the right thing



By the time this issue of *The Postal Record* reaches you, the midterm elections will mercifully be over. Once again, letter carriers and other working people have fought a valiant fight, with our modest political donations and thousands of volunteer activists against the big money of corporate America, to determine the direction of our country. This time, we also took on new so-called Tea Party groups financed by the same millionaires and billionaires that have funded anti-labor, right-wing politics for decades.

Thanks to your COLCPE contributions, NALC was a leader in the labor movement fighting to elect a Congress that is committed to attacking the jobs crisis, restoring the middle class and helping the Postal Service recover from the Great Recession. As I write, we don't know the results, but I know we have done our part to make our democratic system work for working families.

Unfortunately, thanks to an outrageous Supreme Court decision that unleashed a tsunami of secret money to finance attack ads that shamefully debase our democracy and the quality of our political debate, the parties most responsible for the disastrous state of our economy—Wall Street banks, outsourcing multinationals and the anti-worker national Chamber of Commerce—were able to overwhelm the campaign coffers of many good public servants and candidates.

But we cannot and will not give up on our democracy or our fight for a better country. Indeed, even before the new Congress takes office in January, the current Congress still can make a huge difference in the future of the Postal Service and our country by enacting H.R. 5746, Rep. Stephen Lynch's bill that will redirect a massive Postal Service pension surplus in the CSRS (\$55 to \$75 billion) to pre-fund future retiree health benefits. It is the unfair requirement to pre-fund those benefits at the crushing cost of \$5.5 billion a year—which no other agency or business

faces—that threatens the financial viability of the USPS. NALC will pull out all the stops to pressure Congress and the Obama administration to let us use our own pension surplus to cover these costs.

Before the election, Congress had a chance to pass H.R. 5746—or at least defer \$4 billion of the 2010 pre-funding payment until further reform could pass—but it failed. A GOP filibuster stymied the \$4 billion relief proposal and forced the USPS to make another \$5.5 billion payment—using up all of its limited borrowing authority—on September 30.

That step leaves the USPS in a precarious financial position, with very low cash reserves, and unnecessarily risks a disruption in vital postal services later this year. Such a disruption would cause enormous damage to the national economy at the worst possible moment—just as we are struggling to recover from the worst recession in 80 years. I have never witnessed a more reckless political decision in my life. Fortunately, it is not too late for the 111th Congress to redeem itself.

On November 15, the outgoing Congress will return to Washington for a “lame duck” session where it must deal with some very important unfinished business. We will seek to make H.R. 5746 a part of that business. The government is currently operating under a so-called continuing resolution (CR), which maintains spending at last year's levels, until early December. So Congress must act on several appropriations bills to fund federal agencies for the rest of the year, or pass another CR to accomplish the same result.

NALC will urge Congress to attach H.R. 5746 to an appropriations bill or to any new CR that is approved. We will face the usual partisan opposition, along with false charges that recovering our own pension surplus to fund future retiree health benefits represents a “taxpayer bailout.” But we will meet that challenge. Partisan politics failed us in September. We can't let it happen again in November. 