Vote looms for Control of Congress

Will we continue progress?

Reams of paper, barrels of ink and extensive air time have been devoted to the congressional elections set for November 2, and the attention will only increase over the next few weeks. As the ballooning years and the campaigns intensify, we should keep three broad themes in mind.

First, this is a critical election. We’ve all grown jaded to hearing, cycle after cycle, how each election is pivotal, a turning point, one of the most important of our lifetime. That’s often an overstatement, promulgated by media outlets intent on stirring up interest among their audience or by political strategists aiming to energize their party’s base. But in this case, it applies.

“We will either rebuild a fundamentally different economy that values hard work and a strong middle class—or turn back toward one that feeds up with Bush-Cheney policies and as the root of all evil while worshiping corporate profits, who fight safety measures and other protections for working people—know very well what’s at stake. So they are pulling out all stops to regain power. Cynically, they are using the economy to buttress their arguments—even though it was their policies of tax cuts for the rich, financial deregulation and a lack of oversight, unfunded wars and a failure to invest in our country’s basic needs that led us to the brink in the first place.

Third, and most critical: We can make a difference. The fact that the political landscape is tough doesn’t mean we shouldn’t engage—it means we should fight all the harder. With our profession and our jobs, our country and our future in jeopardy, we owe it to ourselves and our families to give it all we have. The Tom Petty song that played as President Rolando came to the podium to deliver the keynote address at our convention in August comes to mind: “I Won’t Back Down.”

For we, of all people, have never shied from a battle—whether working in adverse conditions, protecting our customers when danger strikes, or serving our country at a time of war. The forces of “no”—those who vehemently oppose progress toward a fairer society and a balanced labor-management system, who side with the have and are indifferent toward the haves and are indifferent toward the rest of us, who regard government as the root of all evil while worshiping corporate profits, who fight safety measures and other protections for working people—know very well what’s at stake. So they are pulling out all stops to regain power.

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The NALC is backing worthy candidates for both congressional and state races in the upcoming election. The involvement of every letter carrier is key to a successful outcome and will mean only as much as you make them mean. The involvement of every letter carrier is the key to a successful outcome.

A worthy fight

This one truly matters, for letter carriers, for the labor movement and working people as a whole, and for the country and its future. Think that’s hyperbole? Consider two scenarios.

On November 3, a chastened congressional majority, having survived a scare the night before and finding itself still in power, takes a collective sigh of relief—and then renews itself to earning the public’s trust by redoubling efforts to increase jobs. It meets with unions and businesses and others to discuss how to keep existing good jobs in the United States and encourage the creation of others. As President Rolando noted several times at the Anaheim convention, no workers are more respected than we are, no one is more highly regarded in our communities. There has never been a better time to put that respect and that influence to use—for the well-being of our families, our communities and our nation.

With high unemployment affecting the ability of some unions to participate fully, our engagement becomes even more important. "We need to be involved," Rolando says, "because labor is looking for conversations with work colleagues and neighbors, are powerful weapons in the 435 House races and one-third of Senate seats up for grabs. If we influence enough races, we can keep those who oppose us at bay for at least another two years—years that will be critical both for our profession and our country.

The NALC is backing worthy candidates from both parties in a bipartisan effort to assure a majority that works for all the interests of all Americans. We respect the labor movement, and understand our specific issues. Our endorsement is a sign of respect and that influence to use—for the benefit of the country and its future.

We will bargain for a new contract with the goal not to lift all working people as a whole. Free trade and globalization is needed in a country where it’s harder than ever to form a union where it’s easier to form a union in any other country. We will be blamed for all the ills of the world. Employee Free Choice Act—badly needed in a country where it’s harder to form a union in any other country. We will be blamed for all the ills of the world. Employee Free Choice Act—badly needed in a country where it’s harder to form a union in any other country.

We will continue to work toward legislation that corrects the central economic problems of the unprecedent obligation for the USPS to pre-fund $87 billion in future retiree healthcare benefits. This was accomplished the past two years and to assert their anti-government agenda. They pledge to reduce the number—and pay—of public employees. They move to reinitiate the Bush-Cheney tax cuts for millionaires, borrowing billions of dollars from China and elsewhere to do so. They vow to stick it to the unions. They push for privatization everywhere they can—motivated by an ideological distaste for government, a wish to reward their corporate allies and a political desire to weaken public-sector unions. And they set out to embarrass and harass the administration as much as possible; calculating that stalemate in Washington and economic failure will help them seize the White House in 2012.

Now, it is against one of these two backdrops over the next couple of months that the nation’s letter carriers will be waging annual fights to keep six-day delivery and avert what President Rolando has termed a “slippery slope” to further cuts in service that could destroy the United States Postal Service. We will push to become partners with USPS management to find ways to achieve a different outcome—marked by expanded service and increased revenue—not only to protect 80,000 postal worker jobs at stake but so the USPS can flourish and be able to meet rising demand when the economy improves. We will continue to work toward legislation that corrects the central economic problems of the unprecedent obligation for the USPS to pre-fund $87 billion in future retiree healthcare benefits. This was accomplished the past two years and to assert their anti-government agenda. They pledge to reduce the number—and pay—of public employees. They move to reinitiate the Bush-Cheney tax cuts for millionaires, borrowing billions of dollars from China and elsewhere to do so. They vow to stick it to the unions. They push for privatization everywhere they can—motivated by an ideological distaste for government, a wish to reward their corporate allies and a political desire to weaken public-sector unions. And they set out to embarrass and harass the administration as much as possible; calculating that stalemate in Washington and economic failure will help them seize the White House in 2012. We will push to become partners with USPS management to find ways to achieve a different outcome—marked by expanded service and increased revenue—not only to protect 80,000 postal worker jobs at stake but so the USPS can flourish and be able to meet rising demand when the economy improves. We will continue to work toward legislation that corrects the central economic problems of the unprecedent obligation for the USPS to pre-fund $87 billion in future retiree healthcare benefits. This was accomplished the past two years and to assert their anti-government agenda. They pledge to reduce the number—and pay—of public employees. They move to reinitiate the Bush-Cheney tax cuts for millionaires, borrowing billions of dollars from China and elsewhere to do so. They vow to stick it to the unions. They push for privatization everywhere they can—motivated by an ideological distaste for government, a wish to reward their corporate allies and a political desire to weaken public-sector unions. And they set out to embarrass and harass the administration as much as possible; calculating that stalemate in Washington and economic failure will help them seize the White House in 2012. We will push to become partners with USPS management to find ways to achieve a different outcome—marked by expanded service and increased revenue—not only to protect 80,000 postal worker jobs at stake but so the USPS can flourish and be able to meet rising demand when the economy improves. We will continue to work toward legislation that corrects the central economic problems of the unprecedent obligation for the USPS to pre-fund $87 billion in future retiree healthcare benefits. This was accomplished the past two years and to assert their anti-government agenda. They pledge to reduce the number—and pay—of public employees. They move to reinitiate the Bush-Cheney tax cuts for millionaires, borrowing billions of dollars from China and elsewhere to do so. They vow to stick it to the unions. They push for privatization everywhere they can—motivated by an ideological distaste for government, a wish to reward their corporate allies and a political desire to weaken public-sector unions. And they set out to embarrass and harass the administration as much as possible; calculating that stalemate in Washington and economic failure will help them seize the White House in 2012.

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SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2010
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LETTER CARRIERS

A tough fight
Let’s be clear: We are not satisfied with the progress that has been made in terms of improving the economy and creating jobs. The Congress and the administration moved quickly and decisively to help avert a second Great Depression, but much more remains to be done. We want Capitol Hill to focus greater attention on jobs and on helping a beleaguered middle class. It’s important to point out that government is not the enemy; public employees are not the problem. While it’s easy to play on concerns about supposed growth of government, much of what is said simply isn’t true, and our job at the NALC includes making sure people know the facts about the public sector. The current deficit is a result of the tax cuts for the wealthy during the Bush years as well as the funding of wars with borrowed money, not because of any increase in the size of government. For many years, the portion of government employees within the overall workforce has held steady at about 10 percent.

In short, the problems do not stem from government getting too big or from anything President Obama has done to save the economy, but rather from declining revenues—and from insufficient demand, which won’t increase until more people have jobs. “Spending to create jobs is a necessity,” Trumka said, “and fears of the deficit are only hampering recovery. We must not pull back on stimulating the economy. Unless leaders in Washington address this challenge with the focus they brought to rescuing our banks, not only will a generation of workers be doomed to unemployment and the recovery itself put at risk, but dealing with our long-term fiscal problems will be all the more difficult.”

A winnable fight
So, this is a daunting challenge. But we have advantages going into this fight that have largely been overlooked by the media and political analysts—and that could lead to a lot of surprised faces on election eve. Here are some important ones to keep in mind:

The battle to save Saturday mail delivery service. The struggle to preserve our pay and benefits. The fight to ensure the viability of the Postal Service. We letter carriers frequently find ourselves in the middle of a fight, playing offense or defense to secure the livelihood we’ve worked so hard to achieve. The current COLCPE contest applies a lighthearted spin to our penchant for pugilism by pitting pairs of states or territories against each other in an effort to increase member contributions to our union’s political action fund, the Committee on Letter Carrier Political Education. And in this engagement, each of us comes out a winner.

This latest campaign matches up jurisdictions with roughly equal numbers of members, and creates some geographical rivalries (Pennsylvania versus New Jersey, for one) as well as some interesting cross-country competitions (such as New York versus New Jersey). The goal, as always, is to encourage more active and retired NALC members to give to COLCPE, the fund that allows our union to endorse candidates for Congress—regardless of party affiliation—who firmly stand with us and promise to promote our causes on Capitol Hill. COLCPE also lets the NALC use as prizes in future COLCPE raffles and budget its resources.

Winning state associations will conduct a raffle to draw, at random, the names of three “Gimme 5” automatic contributors. Raffle winners will receive a $200 American Express gift card.

Adding it up
Contest results will be tabulated and include all contributions made through the end of November. The state in each pairing that has the highest percentage of “Gimme 5 for COLCPE” contributors will be declared the contest winner. The “Gimme 5” programs, begun in 2006, simply ask active carriers to automatically contribute at least $5 per pay period to COLCPE by electronic funds transfer (EFT) or by using one of their three payroll allotments. Retirees are “Gimme 5” givers when they donate $5 or more a month directly from their annuity payments or by EFT. These automatic contributions provide a steady, dependable flow of money, which in turn helps the NALC’s Legislative and Political Affairs Department more effectively plan and budget its resources.

The “Gimme 5” program has proven to be a perfect spot to meet with Rep. Trungka said, “and fears of the
deficit are only hampering recovery. We must not pull back on stimulating the
economy. Unless leaders in Washington address this challenge with the focus they brought to rescuing our banks, not only will a generation of workers be doomed to unemployment and the recovery itself put at risk, but dealing with our long-term fiscal problems will be all the more difficult.”

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Winning state associations will each conduct a raffle to draw, at random, the names of three “Gimme 5” automatic contributors. Raffle winners will receive a $200 American Express gift card.

Also, the top three states will receive a plaque and $500 in American Express gift cards that can be used as prizes in future COLCPE raffles in those states.

State associations can track their progress on the union’s website, nalc.org. Final, official results will be published in the special COLCPE edition of The Postal Record in February.

COLCPE at the Convention
Two COLCPE raffles were held at the Anaheim Convention in August. The NALC’s way of saying thanks to the men and women who give to COLCPE every pay period at the New London Post Office. A lucky winner won $20,000 in that same period.

Although the deadline for both raffles was June 30, last-minute sign-ups that helped members qualify for each were accepted at the Legislative Department’s booth at the Anaheim Convention Center.
Mobilization is critical, and though our opponents hope has elected to not make an endorsement this election cycle. There are a few congressional and senate races where NALC members and our issues. We encourage all of our members and congressional leaders, to some extent it will also be a choice between actual candidates and state or district issues—which often will help us. “In state after state,” Trumka says, “the elections have come down to a choice between leaders who will stand with working people as economic patriots vs. those whose right-wing agenda will choke off economic recovery.” Pro-labor candidates don’t have to win all the races to win the election. The real goal here, aside from helping as many endorsed candidates as possible to win, is to avoid a change of control in either chamber that would make our work harder. Anti-labor forces could score gains overall but still remain in the minority. None of this assures that we will prevail; it merely suggests that we have a fighting chance—if we fight. If we roll up our sleeves over the next few weeks, do what is in our interest and the national interest—we have a chance to influence the history of this country. Should we do this, our efforts won't stop there. Victory will not mean we give our allies a free ride. On the contrary, buttressed by the election role we played, we will press our issues—this time, the Employee Free Choice Act, six-day delivery, remedial action to fix the USPS pre-funding problem, expansion of services and revenue. Let’s get to work and make it happen! 

Vote looms for Control of Congress

Above: NALC members are working to elect Missouri Democratic Senate candidate Robin Carnahan.

Below: Re-electing Rep. Bruce Braley (IA-1) is a priority for Iowa members.