



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 balloting nears 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 puts corporate interests before people," AFL-CIO President Richard

Trumka says, helping walk the economy back from the cliff while introducing structural reform in areas such as Wall Street regulation and health care that will leave us less vulnerable in the future. He and our congressional allies have accomplished this despite unrelenting opposition from special corporate interests. Further, this is an administration and a Congress that understand the plight of working people and that have worked with us and other unions—a welcome change from the brick wall we previously encountered.

The question before us is whether the progress will continue or Washington will instead revert to the Bush-Cheney policies that got us into this mess while also producing the biggest gap between the rich and everyone else in 80 years. It was, by many accounts, the most anti-labor administration in history—and one of the most fiscally irresponsible, turning a record surplus into a huge deficit, enabled by a rubber-stamp Congress.

And, for us as letter carriers, it gets more personal. The issues we care about—protecting six-day delivery, negotiating a good contract, strengthening the United States Postal Service—will become far more problematic if

an imploding financial system—voted for a young president who promised change. Together with allies in Congress, Barack Obama has delivered significant progress on major fronts—

or revive Bush-era policies?

Congress is taken over by those who oppose labor, disdain government and mock public employees. Let's not mince words. The future of our single employer—the USPS—is at stake, and much will depend on how this election turns out.

"We have an enormous amount at play over the next couple of years, and much of it will be greatly influenced by how this election goes," says National Association of Letter Carriers President Fredric V. Rolando.

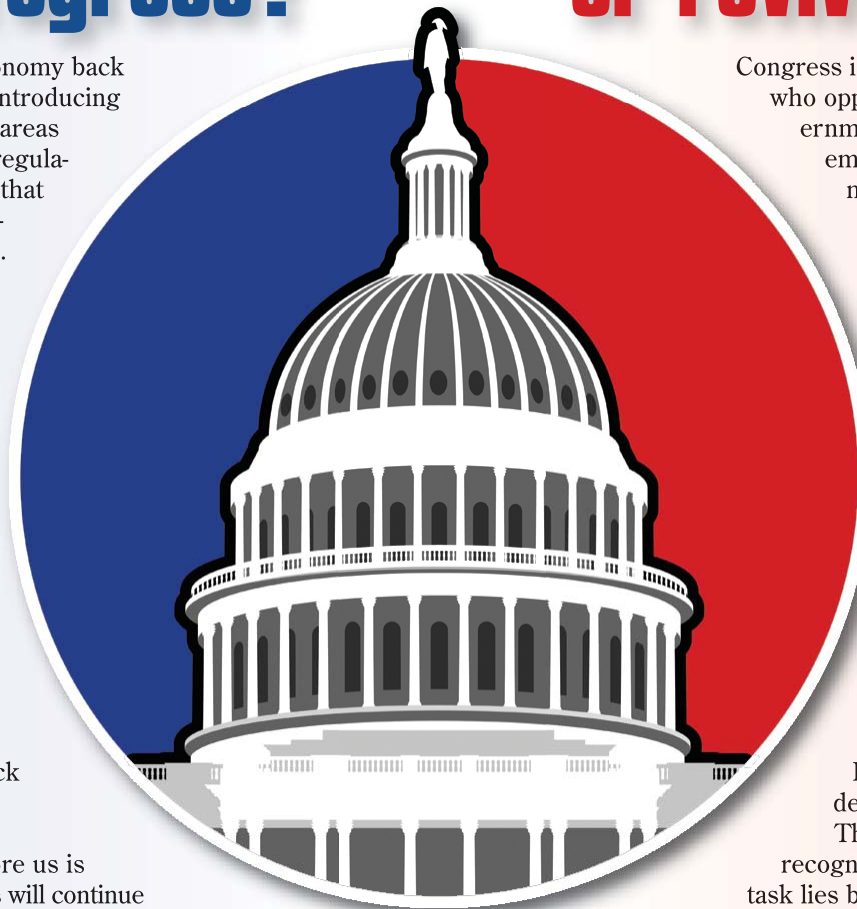
The second point is to recognize just how difficult a task lies before us. We must not sugarcoat the reality or underestimate the work required. Midterm elections generally are rough for the party occupying the White House, all the more so when the same party controls Congress—because problems tend to be blamed on those in power. That's the case even when they're trying to clean up the mess they inherited—as is now the case with the struggling economy.

The forces of "no"—those who vehemently oppose progress toward a fairer society and a balanced labor-management system, who side with the haves and are indifferent toward the rest of us, who regard government

as the root of all evil while worshipping 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 need.

And the good news is that what the NALC does in the next four weeks *will* matter. As letter carriers, we are spread out all over the country, in every congressional district throughout this land. Our votes, our phone calls and door-to-door canvassing, our



NALC endorsed Republican Rep. Jo Ann Emerson (MO-8), a long-time friend of the union.



Thumbs up for Rep. Mike Arcuri (NY-24).



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Top: Wisconsin state chair Scott Van Derven (at left) was on stage for a Labor Day event in Wisconsin that featured President Obama.

Above: Joyce Elliot is NALC's choice for representative from Arkansas' 2nd district.

Below: NALC leaders in California back Dr. Ami Bera for California's 3rd district.

Bottom: Bill Keating, candidate for Massachusetts' 10th district, gets support from the NALC.



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 in the interests of all Americans, respects the labor movement, and understands our specific issues. Our endorsements are presented following this article. These endorsements, and our political effort as a whole, will mean only as much as you make them mean. The involvement of every letter carrier is the key to a successful outcome in November. As part of the effort, the NALC already has released 95 carriers from their routes to work on the election through November 2 as part of the AFL-CIO's Labor 2010 program, with more to come.

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

leaders like the NALC to step up."

Beyond voting, beyond making the case whenever possible, letter carriers are urged to contact their congressional district liaisons or their state chairs and ask how to get involved in labor's 2010 campaign effort.

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 recommits 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. Toward this end, it works on renegotiating trade deals and on revising tax policies that now encourage corporations to export jobs. It continues to improve regulation of Wall Street and of the banks, makes appointments that will help level the playing field between labor and management, and works with the White House to devise a range of policies that will benefit ordinary Americans.

Or, on November 3, a newly emboldened group of politicians map out plans to take over one or both branches of Congress, declaring a mandate to undo what has been

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 reinstate 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 years 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 eventually 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 problem—the unprecedented obligation for the USPS to pre-fund \$87 billion in future retiree healthcare benefits, even though we have a huge pension surplus in CSRS. We will bargain for a new contract that will set our standard of living for years to come.

This is at once an ambitious, promising and challenging set of objectives to pursue. The question we need to answer is this: Which of the two electoral scenarios described above offers the best chance for success?

Moving to the labor movement as a whole, the stakes are just as high. Labor is now at a crossroads. It has made some membership gains the past two or three years, and divisions within labor are being narrowed. With healthcare passed, the administration has promised to refocus on the Employee Free Choice Act—badly needed in a country where it's harder to form a union than in any other industrial democracy in the world. (Yes, you read that correctly.) Moreover, polls show the public believes the pendulum has swung too far from average folks toward corporate interests. If we can make progress on jobs while continuing to get worker-friendly appointments and rulings, labor is poised to make a comeback. And remember: When wages rise and the middle class flourishes, not only do letter carrier wages follow suit, so too does mail volume.

If, on the contrary, our opponents take over, labor will be depicted as Public Enemy No. 2, trailing only terrorists. We will be blamed for all the nation's ills, particularly those related to the economy, and every effort—whether through laws, federal policies or unjustified probes—will be made to weaken the union movement. The gap between rich and poor will continue to rise, as will the lag between productivity and wages. Free trade and globalization will be pushed at all costs—with the goal not to lift all working people up and improve safety standards and union rights overseas but

Mail your vote in

More than half of the country offers balloting by mail

For many, voting is not as easy as it should be—from having to schedule the time to go to a polling station either on the way to or from work, to waiting in inclement weather or in long lines. Not so in Oregon, where since 1998, all elections are conducted by mail. That means voters can take their time and make their decision in the privacy of their own homes.

While no other state has gone that far, 28 other states allow citizens to request a mail-in ballot before the November 2 election. The remaining 21 states have requirements that make obtaining a mail-in ballot more difficult. Regulations vary by state, but increasingly, so-called no-excuse absentee voting is permitted, and voters are taking advantage of the option.

"We should make voting as simple as possible," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "Letter carriers are acknowledged year in and year out as the most trusted government employees, and we already handle sensitive financial information, important documents and essential medicines six days a week. Let us do the work of delivering the ballots."

Below is a list of the states that allow some form of voting by mail. Check the rules for your state by contacting county officials in charge of voting or your state's secretary of state. More information about voting can be found at canivote.org.

Alaska	Nevada
Arizona	New Jersey
California	New Mexico
Colorado	North Carolina
Florida	North Dakota
Georgia	Ohio
Hawaii	Oklahoma
Idaho	Oregon
Illinois	South Dakota
Iowa	Utah
Kansas	Vermont
Maine	Washington
Maryland	Wisconsin
Montana	Wyoming
Nebraska	



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rather to lower wages here. The global race to the bottom will continue. Union membership could well take a hit, one that would make it increasingly difficult for labor to remain a vital force.

What is at risk for the country overall is no less evident. For years, the middle class was placed under assault by an unprecedented transfer of wealth to the richest Americans and by the skewing of our industrial relations system toward the corporate side. And that was before the economy was literally driven into the ditch two years ago. Can the United States really afford to repeat this bad movie—when we all know how it ends?

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:



Top: A Labor Day picnic was the perfect spot to meet with Rep. Suzanne Kosmas (FL-24).

Above: Kansas Republican Senate candidate Jerry Moran reached out to NALC, promising to support issues important to letter carriers.

Friendly fight

COLCPE contest puts the "fun" in 'fund-raising'

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 California).

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 release dozens of letter carrier activists to work on the AFL-CIO's election year get-out-the-vote drives.

Since this latest contest was announced in July, state legislative chairs across the country have been working tirelessly with the branches in their states and territories to help all members understand just how crucial letter carrier political activism is, espe-

cially now that our employer, the United States Postal Service, is pushing the misguided notion of dropping mail delivery service on Saturdays—a short-sighted cost-cutting measure that could mean the loss of 80,000 good paying postal jobs.

Adding it up

Contest results will be tabulated to 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" program, begun in 2006, simply asks 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.

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 "Gimme 5" level.

Stephen Lipski of South Jersey Branch 908 won the top prize—a trip for two to the 2011 NCAA Final Four, which includes a pair of tickets to college basketball's Final Four and national championship games in Houston, airfare, a three-night hotel stay and a per diem for expenses. Lipski's name was drawn from a pool of active and retired "Gimme 5" contributors.

In the second drawing, Raymond Eisenberger of Norristown, PA Branch 542 won a 42-inch flat-panel high-definition television. This second raffle included active carriers who contributed at least \$120 between January 1 and June 30, or retirees who gave \$60 in that same period.

Although the deadline for both raffles was June 30, last-chance sign-ups that helped members qualify for each were accepted at the Legislative Department's booth at the Anaheim Convention Center. ☐

