

Election time: No turning back



Once again, it is a time to choose, for both letter carriers and the American people. Union elections and congressional elections are at hand. In both cases, now is the time to go forward, not to turn back.

As citizens, we are blessed to live in one of the world's great democracies where public officials can be held accountable to voters and where free speech and debate allow us to shape the course of our country. This November 2, we get to choose our leaders and decide the direction of our country. Cynics who dismiss this power and who say it doesn't matter whom we elect are just flat wrong.

As letter carriers, we are doubly blessed to have what nearly nine out of 10 workers in America don't have—a union and a voice in our place of work. We get to choose our workplace leaders and the future direction of our union as well. At our convention in Anaheim, we started that democratic process with nominations. I was deeply honored to be elected president of this great union by acclamation along with every other national officer and 10 business agents. Elections for the five other NBA races will be determined in postal balloting in October. I want to thank every branch leader and activist for trusting me and my fellow national officers with this great responsibility and I pledge to every member of the NALC that we will do everything in our power to fight for your best interests in the four years to come.

As federal employees, the importance of democracy in our nation and in the work place is intricately linked. Who runs Congress and the policies they adopt are more important to us than to just about any other kind of worker. Congress doesn't just decide what public goods and services are worth providing and how we should pay for them; it also holds the power to make or break our employer and determine the quality of our pensions and health benefits. Congress controls our collective bargaining rights and holds the key to our job security. At the same time, NALC has the power to negotiate the pay and working conditions of letter carriers across the country. Few workers

have more riding both on the union elections and on the mid-term elections before us than letter carriers do. So it's both a blessing and a deeply important responsibility to exercise your right to vote in both sets of elections.

Coming out of the union's election, we are determined to go forward, not backward. That means honoring our past and defending our achievements, but also imagining a new future as well. We must innovate and change to protect the long-term viability of the Postal Service and the job security of letter carriers. For this reason, I was pleased the convention authorized the NALC Executive Council to explore early collective bargaining negotiations with postal management to deal with the challenges facing the Postal Service. As I told the delegates in Anaheim:

NALC is 100 percent committed to fight to protect the job security and standard of living of letter carriers, no matter what economic conditions we face. Our legitimate place in the middle class was achieved over several decades of struggle. We will not give it up.

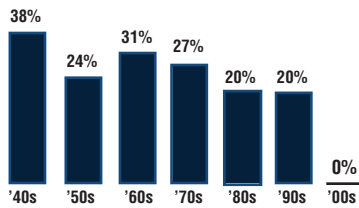
If the Postal Service approaches bargaining in good faith, and with creativity, it will have a willing partner. If it respects the central role of letter carriers in the future of the Service and acknowledges the sacrifices we have made to help us survive the crisis, we will have productive talks.

But if the USPS approaches bargaining with the goal of gutting our pay and benefits, or tries to exploit the national economic crisis by making demands for sharp cuts and givebacks, it will have a bloody fight on its hands. We are prepared to be creative. We are not prepared to fall on our swords.

NALC is also committed to the long-term viability of the Postal Service. We want to find new ways to make the Postal Service useful to America's businesses and to the American people. Our first and last mile networks are unmatched and under-utilized. Adding

There was **zero net job creation** in the first decade of the new millennium, compared to healthy job growth in each of the previous six decades.

Job growth: percent change in payroll employment. *

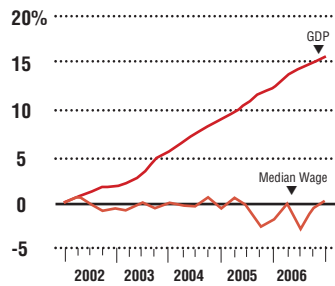


*2000s extends through Nov. 2009

Source: The Washington Post

Divergence

The median wage has lagged behind overall economic growth since the expansion began. Cumulative change:



new public services, employing new technology on carrier routes and working with mailers, old and new, to find innovative ways to help their businesses grow and prosper are the keys to a secure future for letter carriers. Labor and management must work together to create a culture that spurs such innovation. We have no time to lose.

NALC will pursue both goals—upholding our living standards and building a culture of innovation—in the months and years to come. This is the direction we have chosen in the union’s election.

But in the short term, the other election—the congressional mid-term election—may be even more important for our future. We can’t go backward at that level either.

Helping the Postal Service overcome

the worst recession in 80 years by allowing it to use its pension surplus to cover the cost of future retiree health benefits is absolutely essential. Solving the problem of mass unemployment is the key to the kind of economic recovery that will help the Postal Service grow again. Choosing the right way to close the huge deficit caused by the Great Recession is crucial to letter carriers: Will we make the pirates on Wall Street who distorted our economy pay, or will Congress slash our pensions and health benefits and destroy the Social Security system? All these important issues will be decided by the November 2 election. We must make our voices heard by not just voting, but by working with our union to encourage our families, friends and co-workers to vote for pro-worker candidates as well.

In this issue of *The Postal Record*, NALC has published the names of candidates for Congress we endorse (see page 10). We strongly urge you to vote for them. As a union, we must focus only on workplace issues when deciding whom to support—and the 300 or so endorsements we have made include both Democrats and Republicans who have demonstrated their support for letter carriers and a strong, viable Postal Service.

There is much anger in the country over the state of our economy. This anger, which animates the so-called Tea Party movement, is legitimate. But it is misdirected. “Big Government” did not cause the economic crisis—an out-of-control Wall Street unleashed by weak government regulation caused the crisis. The deficit was not caused by President Obama or by Washington’s “out of control” spending (unless Tea Partiers are referring to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan or the inequitable tax cuts that President Bush refused to pay for)—it was caused by the collapse of tax revenues due to the recession. The stimulus program worked; it saved millions of jobs (including the strategically important auto industry) and prevented a second Great Depression. Unfortunately, the crisis was much bigger than expected.

Now is not the time to go back to the discredited economic policies of the Bush administration—tax cuts for the wealthy, deregulation and unrestrained free trade. These policies failed to increase the number of jobs in the U.S. between 2001 and 2008 or raise the real wages of typical workers over the same period (see charts above), the worst economic performance since the 1930s. In fact, workers lost ground.

We are making real progress in rebuilding an economy that will work for America’s working families. The health care reform passed earlier this year is not perfect, but it represents a huge improvement over the status quo where greedy insurance companies dominate and tens of millions of Americans can’t get affordable protection. Wall Street reform was not perfect, but it will begin the process of reining in the reckless behavior that trashed our economy. We must continue this progress by rebuilding our country’s infrastructure and its middle class. Misdirected anger or apathy on November 2 will only make things worse. Let’s not let that happen. Instead, let’s move our agenda, our job security, and the well-being of our families and our nation forward. ☒