

Battling on three fronts to save America's Postal Service



Harry Truman famously said that “If you want a friend in Washington, get a dog.” That remark resonates in 2011 as we fight to save our jobs and the future of America’s Postal Service. In politics, reliable friends are hard to come by. So as we battle on three distinct legislative fronts, we cannot rely solely on congressional friends to save the USPS. We have to rely on each other, too. And we have to do it even as we work to negotiate a new labor contract. Fortunately, NALC’s membership and activists have responded magnificently to the challenge of this three-front legislative war. Let’s take stock of the situation.

In the House of Representatives, the GOP leadership of our oversight committee has produced a bill, H.R. 2309, that seeks to exploit the financial crisis that Congress created to radically downsize the Postal Service and gut our collective-bargaining rights. It would destroy the quality of mail service by eliminating Saturday delivery and door-to-door service, and therefore drive more mail out of the system—at a cost of tens of thousands of city carrier jobs. It would empower unelected commissions to dismantle our retail and processing networks and to rewrite our labor contracts over our objections. And it would not address the true cause of the financial crisis: the unfair burden to pre-fund future retiree health benefits.

In the Senate, a better but ultimately misguided bill (S. 1789) crafted by Sens. Lieberman, Collins, Carper and Brown would lead to the more gradual dismantling of the Postal Service. It would preserve six-day delivery, but for just two more years, and implement a less draconian reduction in door-to-door delivery. But the end result would be the same as with the House bill: a drastically diminished USPS and tens of thousands of lost jobs. Meanwhile, the financial relief provided by the bill—modestly restructuring the pre-funding burden—would fall far short of what is needed to return the USPS to profitability. Sadly, the bill drops the only real solution to funding this burden: the use of the fairly calculated postal surplus in the Civil Service Retirement System. Without it, the pre-funding mandate should be suspended.

Finally, as this issue goes to press, the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction, the so-called House-Senate “super committee,” is set to announce its recommendations for reducing the nation’s deficit by \$1.2 trillion over the next 10 years. It is considering the elimination of Saturday delivery in its package of budget cuts, even though we receive no taxpayer money.

NALC has mobilized its resources and its membership in unprecedented ways in recent months to fight back. Through a combination of intensive grassroots lobbying, persistent public outreach and a national media campaign, we have educated the public on the true nature of the crisis and why dismantling the Postal Service will not save it. Over the past two months, we have:

- Organized more than 500 public rallies at congressional offices around the country to build majority support in the House of Representatives for H.R. 1351, a bill that resolves the pre-funding crisis in a sensible manner.
- Launched a massive petition drive in support of Saturday delivery that has collected more than three-quarters of a million signatures from Americans in less than three weeks.
- Held a town hall meeting by telephone in which an astonishing 57,000 members joined to learn how to lobby their congressional representatives about the dangers of H.R. 2309 during the Veterans Day recess and how to weigh in on the markup of S. 1789 in the Senate.
- Unveiled an advertising campaign highlighting the contributions of America’s veterans to the success of the Postal Service and the need to provide job opportunities to returning soldiers at a time of mass employment in our country.

Thanks to the tireless activism of so many members, we are delivering a clear message to Congress: We will do our part at the collective-bargaining table, but Congress must do its part to save America’s Postal Service as well. We have something that President Truman didn’t mention—not just friends, but brothers and sisters. Thank you all, and solidarity forever! ☒