

Getting out the truth, promoting the value of USPS



One of my mentors in the NALC was fond of Mark Twain's famous observation that "[a] lie can run around the world six times while the truth is putting its pants on." Never has that seemed more true to me than when it comes to the situation facing the Postal Service. As the USPS heads toward a financial meltdown created by Congress when it mandated massive pre-funding of retiree health benefits on the eve of the worst recession in decades, the sheer volume of misinformation in the media about the Postal Service is breathtaking.

Everywhere you look, from the cover story of the May 26 edition of *Bloomberg Businessweek* ("The Postal Service Nears Collapse") to the editorial pages of *The Washington Post* (multiple times over the past 18 months) to the cable news airwaves of Fox Business News, the media is full of bogus reporting and opinion about what ails the Postal Service. Rather than reporting the truth—that pre-funding is 100 percent responsible for the huge losses of recent years—most media outlets blame the Internet, "greedy unions" or the inherent inefficiency of government services for the Postal Service's financial woes. It is annoying, and it's dangerous to our interests.

The NALC's officers and dedicated staff are doing all they can to beat back this wave of media misinformation. But we need your help to get the truth out about the causes of the crisis and the value of preserving universal delivery services, six days a week. That's why we have mailed every branch president a fact sheet on the situation facing the Postal Service. We are urging them to brief branch activists and aggressively engage the media in their communities to get the reporting right on the Postal Service and what is needed to secure its long-term viability. We also are preparing a special page on our website to combat the problem of false reporting and misguided opinions in the media.

In early June, the problem reached a new low for me when the *Miami Herald* ran an outrageous op-ed titled, "Mark a Postal Service bailout 'return to sender.'" As a Floridian and a long-term subscriber to the paper, I was astounded by the laughably

poor quality of the commentary. Let me give you a quick example. The article's second paragraph said:

Make that two bailouts. The Postal Service is not only trying to sneak a direct \$75 billion payment out of the government without congressional approval, it's also seeking to be let off the hook for a \$5.5 billion payment into a trust fund to guarantee the absurdly generous pension benefits it has promised its retirees. When the Postal Service can't pay those benefits a few years down the line, who do you think will get the bill? Hint: Look in the mirror.

Incredibly, this one short paragraph includes *eight* errors. That has to be some kind of record for journalistic failure. The commentary manages to totally distort the issue and mislead its readers. Go to nalc.org/PostalFacts for a breakdown of all the ways this one paragraph is wrong. But the bottom line is that the Postal Service, its unions and the industry we represent are not seeking a bailout; we're seeking justice and basic fairness—we want to use our own pension surpluses to cover the cost of retiree health benefits. That cost is unfairly crippling the Postal Service's finances. Period.

Of course, while we have to combat the misinformation and get accurate information out there, we also must engage in sustained legislative and political activism. We are making progress in the House of Representatives, where the Lynch bill (H.R. 1351) now has 149 co-sponsors, Democrats and Republicans alike. And this month we will fight to shape legislation emerging in the Senate where a mark-up of the Carper (or Carper-Collins) bill is possible. Our state legislative activists and our Washington-based legislative team are working around the clock to ensure financial relief for the USPS. Contact your representative in Washington to co-sponsor H.R. 1351 if he or she has not done so already (check the NALC website), follow the lead of your local leaders and look for my e-Activist messages.

No matter how right Mark Twain was, we can win if we work together. The truth and the value of the Postal Service can win the day. ☒