

Rap session focus: Saving America's Postal Service



The battle for the future of the Postal Service came into sharp focus last month. On Oct. 13, the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee marked up and passed by a narrow margin a bill sponsored by Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA) that would radically downsize the Postal Service by mandating a massive round of post office closings and eliminating Saturday delivery, direct the USPS to lay off senior postal employees, cut our health benefits and gut our collective-bargaining rights. The Issa bill (H.R. 2309) is to the Postal Service what the Paul Ryan budget is to Medicare: It would destroy the agency (see story, page 8).

On Oct. 16, at the National Rap Session in Las Vegas, the leaders of the NALC gathered to offer a quite different vision for the future, one that will preserve universal service and six-day delivery by finding new ways to use our unmatched retail, processing and delivery networks to serve our country.

The stakes for every letter carrier in America could not be higher—Congress must decide which vision for the USPS it wants to embrace. Our jobs, our benefits and our futures are on the line. We must do all we can to make sure that legislators choose wisely. That's why I took two major steps at this year's rap session. I launched the second phase of our "Save America's Postal Service" campaign, and I announced the hiring of two high-powered economic advisors to help us develop an alternative to the plans to dismantle the Postal Service offered by postal management and some representatives in Congress.

Following the success of the nationwide rallies in support of H.R. 1351 on Sept. 27, which pushed up the number of co-sponsors of the bill in the House over the 218 votes needed to pass a bill, we must now focus on saving Saturday delivery in the so-called "super committee" of Congress. The 12-member Special Joint Committee on Deficit Reduction is scheduled to issue its recommendations to Congress on Nov. 23. The committee may address the postal crisis in its deficit reduction package, and all the key players, including NALC, USPS and the

White House, have plied the committee with recommendations. Unfortunately, the Postal Service was able to convince the Obama administration to recommend its five-day delivery plan as part of a broader package that provides significant short-term financial relief to the USPS from the congressional mandate to pre-fund retiree health, but it fails to deliver a permanent solution. We will continue to lobby for sensible financial reform, but we need all of you to mobilize right now to defend six-day delivery.

In Phase 2 of our campaign to Save America's Postal Service, we will mobilize the support of the American public for Saturday delivery with a massive petition drive (see story, page 8). Branch leaders at the rap session pledged to collect 10 times the size of their branch memberships in signatures before Nov. 14. We will deliver the petitions from every congressional district to the appropriate member of Congress and ask them to urge the members of the "super committee" to support six-day universal mail service.

We also focused on the longer term at the rap session. In Washington, you can't beat something with nothing. We have to offer a compelling alternative to the slash-and-burn policies advocated by the postmaster general and Rep. Issa. We cannot downsize our ways to health—reducing the quality of service and making it harder for Americans to use our services is not a winning strategy. We need a growth strategy and the vision to offer new services that meet unmet needs.

That is why we hired Ron Bloom, a former investment banker-turned-trade unionist who helped President Obama save the auto industry, and the Lazard Co. investment bank, to help us develop our vision for the future of the USPS (see story, page 4). They will help in collective bargaining and in the broader debate about postal reform.

NALC is determined to save the Postal Service from itself, and from the radical ideologues who want to destroy it. We owe it to the American people, and we owe it to ourselves. ☒