

Like lambs to the slaughter



A few weeks ago, a trade association called the Printing Industries of America held a lobby day on Capitol Hill in support of H.R. 2309, the Postal Reform Act of 2011. You read that right—a key part of the mailing industry appears to want to commit suicide. The rest of the mailing industry has remained strangely quiet as Congress debates bills that would massively downsize the Postal Service and do irreparable harm to the entire mailing industry, which employs nearly 7.5 million workers in the private sector. NALC has refused to passively accept the unacceptable—and the mailing industry should do the same.

H.R. 2309 calls for an accelerated dismantling of the Postal Service in order to maintain the crushing retiree health pre-funding mandate imposed by Congress in 2006, a mandate that is responsible for 85 percent of the losses recorded by USPS since fiscal year 2007 (and 94 percent of the loss in the first half of fiscal year 2012). In fact, the bill actually *increases* the cost of pre-funding, starting in 2013, even though the \$44 billion we have already set aside for future health premiums is already nearly 18 times the annual cost of current retiree premiums and could largely pre-fund all future premiums if the USPS were allowed to invest it properly.

How much printing business will these printers get from mailers if Congress enacts H.R. 2309 and destroys the value of direct mail by slowing service and forcing 35 million Americans to give up door-to-door delivery in favor of less frequently visited cluster boxes? How many weekly newspapers will the printers print when the papers fold after Saturday delivery—the optimum delivery day—is discontinued? And how can the printing industry remain silent about the grossly unfair mandate to pre-fund retiree health—a mandate that no other business or agency in America faces?

Combined with the highly inequitable allocation of CSRS pension liabilities to the Postal Service, which the majority of Congress wants to fix by co-sponsoring H.R. 1351, the pre-funding mandate effectively represents a job-killing tax on the entire mailing industry. Knowing this, how can the

Printing Industries of America support H.R. 2309?

To be fair, most of the mailing industry and the main business lobbies in Washington have stopped short of supporting H.R. 2309. But quietly accepting the legislation is little better. Millions of small businesses stand to lose key services, and face much higher mailing and shipping costs, if the pre-funding mandate is maintained. Yet there is mostly silence from the business community. This is not a time for ideology to triumph—downsizing “the government” should not be more important than the millions of private-sector jobs threatened by the degradation of the Postal Service, a key component of the nation’s economic infrastructure.

When Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA) took charge of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, he famously wrote to all the business trade associations in Washington and asked them to identify federal mandates and regulations that most harmed their businesses. He promised to investigate these regulations and do what he could to repeal them. Apparently, none of the mailers or their associations complained about the pre-funding mandate or the grossly inequitable pension policies of the Office of Personnel Management. You can be sure that if General Electric or FedEx faced the onerous mandate to pre-fund retiree health or if a regulator had shifted tens of billions of pension costs to their companies, Chairman Issa would have been outraged and the companies and their trade associations would not have remained silent.

Fortunately, lots of small companies and local business organizations across the country are beginning to take notice of the potential damage posed by H.R. 2309. Thousands of them joined the NALC’s effort to save Saturday delivery during the PRC examination of the Postal Service’s plan in 2011, and a growing multitude of them have voiced their opposition to H.R. 2309 on the Delivering for America website.

Unfortunately, among the representatives of the mailing industry in Washington, DC, it has been the silence of the lambs. Perhaps they are counting on us to save our industry from the slaughter. Once again, it’s up to us to deliver. ☒