

COLCPE— The bridge to a strong postal future



The mail has bound this union of states together since before the ink on the Declaration of Independence was dry.

Our history is America's history, and just as the nation has adapted to new challenges and made the most of them, the Postal Service has transformed itself to meet the needs of the American public over the centuries.

As the country expanded, the post office expanded with it. When new technology sped the delivery of information to a public hungry for news and vital information and sprawled across an entire continent, the post office responded by taking advantage of its own technological advantages in innovative ways. The telegraph, the telephone, aviation, private competition, the Internet—the Postal Service has successfully confronted all these challenges, often by folding them into its own business model.

The one consistent fact throughout that long history is that the Postal Service has always been a

government agency, subject to the political whims of Washington. And that is why the NALC has always needed a vigorous political and legislative action program.

In this special issue, *The Postal Record* honors the letter carriers who have given generously to the Committee on Letter Carrier Political Education—COLCPE. With the help of their voluntary donations, COLCPE continues to represent the interests of letter carriers in Washington. Thanks to the donors who make its work possible, COLCPE is a big part of the reason we have better jobs and lifestyles than those who came before us.

The lobbying and political activities supported by COLCPE have made NALC a key player in Washington's halls of power. And that's never been more important.

Since Benjamin Franklin took the reins as the first postmaster of the nation in 1775, the postal network and the letter carrier craft have kept pace

with a rapidly growing nation through re-invention and savvy use of new technologies. Today's Postal Service must follow suit—if only Congress will let it happen.

The Postal Service is confronting its greatest historical challenge—the widest bridge it has had to cross on the road to the future. The USPS must transform the services it provides and the way it does business from top to bottom. It must take advantage of new technology and serve the needs of a changing nation. Those goals are within reach, but they require thoughtful, common-sense action by Congress.

Instead, Congress has done what it too often does best—find a way to fail.

It is congressional irresponsibility that created the current artificial financial crisis for the Postal Service. The unnecessary pre-funding of future retiree health benefits and unchecked overcharging for pensions is preventing the Postal Service from focusing on long-term change.

When it comes to dealing with the crisis it created, Congress has shifted from doing nothing, to coming up with terrible ideas, to taking the easy way out, to putting parochial or ideological interests ahead of the needs of the nation and its workers, to doing nothing again. It will take a hard push to get Congress to do its job. That's why we need a strong COLCPE.

Challenge and opportunity

Like the growing, inventing, industrializing nation it was formed to serve, the Post Office Department moved rapidly to innovate, allowing it to expand service, bring down costs to patrons and secure its role as the network that bound the nation together. In 1800, a few key post offices were designated as sorting centers in a hub-and-spoke system that formed the basis for the system still used today.

Population growth and westward expansion stretched the capacity of the system, but the same new forms of transportation that made human movement over long distances possible also were employed to move the mail faster. New roads and canals, followed by railroads, made possible a communication network that spanned the continent.

The role of the post in holding together the United States was sometimes fulfilled literally. In 1861, the Pony Express—a private business working to secure a U.S. mail contract—delivered news accounts of Abraham Lincoln's conciliatory inauguration address to California in time to help quell secession efforts by discontents in the young state.

After railroads began linking the states, telegraph wires were soon built following the railway lines, transmitting the first long-distance, high-speed electronic messages. For the first time, the mail wasn't the fastest way to communicate. But rolling past the lines were new postal railway cars where clerks sorted the mail *en route* and picked up and dropped off mail bags without slowing down, bringing long-distance mail service to a new level.

With the invention of the telephone, people began speaking across the telegraph wires. Excited columnists predicted the end of the mail. Instead, mail volume continued to grow with the nation. As business thrived due to new technology, the mail thrived with it.

The challenges and innovations continued. Trucks sped both city and rural delivery. Aviation brought lightning-speed air mail. Mechanization sped sorting. Private competitors also took advantage of these innovations, but dramatic events would cause Congress to transform the Post Office Department into a new, self-sustaining U.S. Postal Service.

The legacy of 1970

Letter carriers look back proudly at this history and at our role in building the Postal Service. We also cherish our history as part of the labor movement. At the 2010 national convention in Anaheim, we remembered and honored the letter carriers who courageously led perhaps the most important event in our union's history—the Great Postal Strike of 1970.

Mail volume had more than doubled in the years after World War II, putting huge demands on postal workers without commensurate growth in pay or benefits. The situation finally boiled over, and the result was a strike that, despite being only a local strike at first, had a national impact on the system.

Having stood firm despite the threat of losing their jobs or even criminal prosecution, the strikers soon saw the fruits of their labor when Congress granted collective-bargaining rights to postal employees on Aug. 12, 1970, and established the Postal Service as an independent business venture that would earn its own way. Postal workers finally got the voice they deserved and the pay, benefits and working conditions to lift them firmly into the middle class.

But Congress could just as easily take it all away, at any time.

"The federal government is so important to postal employees because it is our employer and it

makes all the rules when it comes to labor and collective bargaining,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said. “Like we always say, Congress could take anything from us at the stroke of a pen. Having a contract isn’t enough, because Congress has the power to break it.”

Because of our status as federal employees, protecting our rights and livelihoods requires a strong presence in politics. There’s a good reason our headquarters is located just a block from the Capitol—closer to this center of power than to USPS headquarters at L’Enfant Plaza.

Our strategy of bargaining collectively and speaking with one voice is what makes a single man or woman carrying mail in a satchel a powerful force capable of standing up for our interests.

COLCPE is also our collective effort.

By pooling our resources, COLCPE allows letter carriers to speak with one voice. COLCPE concentrates our political influence by releasing carriers to work on campaigns for candidates for office who stand strongly behind our craft and our union, and by providing resources for those candidates to get their pro-worker message out before Election Day. COLCPE does all this on a non-partisan basis.

Like our union, which held us together for the strike of 1970, COLCPE gives us unity as we head into perhaps the most important political phase in our history.

“We must take this struggle—a struggle for the future of our union and the future of the Postal Service—directly to Congress,” President Rolando said, “because Congress has failed miserably to address it. Instead of leadership among those in charge on Capitol Hill, we’re getting hostility and denial.”

A chief instigator has been Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA), chairman of the committee that oversees the Postal Service. Issa can barely contain his desire to use the postal crisis to punish unions and public employees rather than save jobs and the mailing industry. Last October, he pushed through his committee a bill he authored (H.R. 2309) that would give an unelected board the power to ignore our contract, slash postal jobs and end door-to-door mailbox service for 90 percent of American businesses and households (*see story, page 4*).

Issa claimed that his bill was the only alternative to a “taxpayer bailout” of the Postal Service. He should know better. The Postal Service has succeeded without taking a dime of taxpayer money for 30 years, and it doesn’t need tax funds now.

“The Postal Service doesn’t need help from taxpayers—it needs Congress to stop bleeding the

Service of its own hard-earned money,” President Rolando said. “The burden of pre-funding retiree health care and overcharges for pension funding are what’s holding the Postal Service back from dealing with its long-term issues.”

The Postal Service has adapted to change before, and it is doing it now. Diversion of First Class mail to the Internet is a challenge, but it is not insurmountable—as long as the Service has the time and the access to its own money to make the necessary changes. With Congress using the Postal Service as a cash cow—which conveniently makes the federal budget deficit look a little smaller than it really is—postal managers are stuck trying to pay next month’s bills instead of looking to the long-term future of the organization. Billions of dollars in cash the Postal Service earned gather dust in the U.S. Treasury—cash that could cover the bills during the economic downturn and pay for investments to ready the Service for new ways of doing business in a changing world.

In a scheme that makes sense only in Washington, the federal government extends a line of credit to the USPS to help it through rough times or to pay for innovations. But the Postal Service has been forced to draw on this line of credit to cover the annual pre-funding payment Congress imposed beginning in 2007. The money is being held in a fund for eventual payback to the Service for health insurance for its retirees. That means the government is loaning money to the Service so the Service can pay it to the government so that the government can give it back to the Service later. It all evens out over several decades—but the problem is that the Service needs its hard-earned cash now.

There are people in Congress who care about our jobs, who value the service the USPS provides to the nation—people like Rep. Stephen Lynch (D-MA), author of legislation to fix the pre-funding problem—and who want to correct this convoluted scheme and allow the Postal Service to build its own future. But they need our help.

Making history in 2012

The forces of history are all converging this year. They could make 2012 as important a year in our history as 1970—or even 1775.

Congress is almost certain to pass legislation that will have an historic impact on the Postal Service. It could launch the USPS toward a new and better future, or it could aim the Service, and our jobs, on a downward trajectory.

Anti-labor forces are bolder than ever before. In Wisconsin, Ohio and several other states, they

Contest winners

Aside from the branch competitions, 10 automatic deduction participants at the Gimme 5 level or higher were chosen at random to win \$100 gift cards.

The winners were Milan Batchelder (South Macomb, MI Branch 4374), Jeanette Davis (South Suburban Merged, IL Branch 4016), Kristine Fiatoa (Aiea-Pearl City, HI Branch 4682), Don Grunnes (Minneapolis Branch 9), Karen Hughes (Austin, TX Branch 181), Timm Kopp (Marshfield, WI Branch 978), Ronnie Ramsey (Nampa, ID Branch 1409), Rodolfo Rodil (Torrance, CA Branch 2207), Jay Sensenig (Norfolk, VA Branch 2207) and Timothy Thompson (Toledo, OH Branch 100).

NALC also gave thanks to e-Activists last year. Members of the e-Activist Network sign up for instant alerts by e-mail or text message from NALC to inform them of the latest developments in Washington, DC, and how they can get involved.

To date, eight e-Activists have won \$100 gift cards: Richard Crocker Sr. (Birmingham, AL Branch 530), William Cunningham Jr. (San Jose, CA Branch 193), Robert Dahl (Minneapolis Branch 9), Mark Gonzales (Northeast Florida Branch 53), Jeffery Harris (Marietta, GA Branch 1119), Jorge Palacio (South Florida Branch 1071), Mark Reynolds (Owensboro, KY Branch 234) and Vu Tran (Atlantic City, NJ Branch 370).

To sign up as an e-Activist, please go to nalc.org/depart/legpol/e-activist.html.

have moved from slowly chipping away at union rights to openly working to destroy unions altogether. They smell blood in the water.

The movement to destroy unions will move to the ballot box again this year, as the voters go to the polls to elect a president, decide which party will control each house of Congress, and pick winners in key state races. Campaigns are operating in a new environment where “Super-PACs” and other independent groups pour unlimited amounts of money into advertisements supporting, or attacking, the candidates. They need help to respond and to keep up with their competitors by putting out their own messages.

If our allies are to have a chance in 2012, they must have support from COLCPE.

“Donating to COLCPE is investing in our future,” President Rolando said. “We need to stick together, and that means everyone doing his or her part to protect our employer, our craft and our union.

“The donors we’re listing in this issue of *The Postal Record* are leaders in this effort, and they deserve our thanks,” he added. “I hope they inspire all members who haven’t given to COLCPE yet to do their share.”

Leading the way

In addition to recognizing COLCPE’s supporters, this issue includes the results of our 2011 contest that presents \$100 gift cards to branches having the highest percentage of Gimme 5 automatic contributors and the greatest increase in automatic Gimme 5 percentages.

The contest put large branches (with more than 450 members) into groups of three, four or five to compete against each other. The branch with the highest percentage of automatic Gimme 5 donors at the end of the competition was declared the winner. Smaller branches had their own “leagues”—branches with 100 to 450 members competed with each other, as did branches with 50 to 99 members, with the top four in each matchup winning prizes. All Gimme 5 donors from every branch also qualified for a raffle to win a gift card.

The results from branches with 50 or more members, with winning branches indicated, are shown on pages 13-16.

“Congratulations to the winning branches and members, and thanks for their support,” President Rolando said. “And thanks to the leaders at each branch who kept reminding the members about the importance of COLCPE and encouraging them to help out.”

Some branches turned in impressive results:

—Salt Lake City Branch 111 boosted its participation by signing up 35 new automatic deduction Gimme 5 contributors.

—Pawtucket, RI Branch 55 added 76 contributors.

—Bismarck, ND Branch 957, with just 80 members, added 27 contributors. The new donors included 16 who signed up during the final month of the competition, moving the branch from fourth place in its category to a runaway winner.

—Chicago Branch 11 added 459 contributors to bring its participation to more than 19 percent.

—Minneapolis Branch 9 added 96 contributors for a participation rate of more than 12 percent.

The members of Newport, RI Branch 57 turned in the highest automatic deduction Gimme 5 participation rate of any branch again this year. The branch grew from 60 percent to 68 percent to continue its reign at the top of the list.

Branch 57 President John Pimentel Jr. cited an effort to boost support for COLCPE delivered through branch meetings, newsletters and other communications to members for his branch’s performance.

“The message is consistent: customer service, Customer Connect and COLCPE,” he said. “Those are the three items we’re after. In the long term, without these, you have nothing.”

Rolando said, “I’m proud of the leadership these winning branches have demonstrated in their support for COLCPE. But regardless of which branch you’re in, if you give to COLCPE, you’re a leader in our union, and you’re helping us bring the Postal Service, and our jobs, into the future.” ☒