

NALC to Congress: Listen up



As the old saying goes, “Everybody complains about the weather, but nobody ever does anything about it.” The same might be said about the Congress.

Today, as never before, Congress is deeply unpopular. A Gallup poll taken in December found that just 11 percent of Americans approve of the job that Congress is doing. That is the lowest congressional rating ever recorded by the pollster.

It is not surprising. Despite repeated wave elections, Congress is mired in partisan gridlock and seems oblivious to the most pressing problems facing the country—persistently high unemployment, rising inequality and the dangerous decline of the middle class. Congress seems willing to risk disaster for the country and its citizens to score partisan political points—whether it is flirting with a default on the national debt last summer, threatening to cut off unemployment benefits for millions of workers last month, or failing to prevent a possible collapse of the United States Postal Service in 2012. Of course, as Americans, we can do something about Congress. We can and we must make members listen. And if they don’t listen, we can and must elect a Congress that will. NALC will do its part to make this happen.

In January, we kicked off this effort with a letter to every member of the House of Representatives and the Senate. The “welcome back” letters challenged Congress to listen to the one million Americans who supported the national petition drive we launched at the National Rap Session in October. The petitions call on Congress to save the U.S. Postal Service by adopting reforms that preserve universal six-day mail service, protect door-to-door delivery, and restore the Postal Service’s financial health by eliminating unfair congressional and administrative policies that have nearly crippled our employer. But that is just the beginning.

NALC is also gearing up for the crucial second session of the 112th Congress. In view of the financial crisis facing the USPS, Congress will be forced to act this year. Our future will depend on the legislative choices Congress makes over the next few months.

To maximize our chances of success, we have developed a legislative and media strategy that will rely heavily on grass-roots activism and communications. We are also working with our advisers to engage the Postal Service and its advisers to investigate new revenue opportunities and develop a common agenda for transforming the Postal Service for the 21st century. Our hope is to convince the leadership of the Postal Service to work with us at the bargaining table and in the halls of Congress to find innovative and intelligent ways to cut costs, expand services and revenues, and restore financial stability to our employer.

Indeed, as this issue went to press, we were seeking an agreement with the postmaster general on this three-tiered approach to shaping the future—developing a joint business plan, reaching consensus on a common legislative agenda, and completing the current round of collective bargaining. If he agrees, we will work closely with our strategic advisers and directly interact with a team of bankers retained by the Postal Service for strategic advice. If we are successful, we hope to emerge this spring with a new collective-bargaining agreement and a viable business plan that can inform the congressional debate about the future of the Postal Service.

NALC is committed to defending the standard of living of America’s letter carriers. But we are equally determined to save America’s Postal Service. We owe it to the American people to assure affordable universal service for decades to come. Together, we can make that a reality—with the Congress we have or the one we will elect in November. Either way, we will do everything we can to make Congress listen. ☒