

NALC needs partners to save the Postal Service



The USPS ended months of productive negotiations in January by declaring a bargaining impasse with us. The parties had made significant progress on a new collective-bargaining agreement, so it is not entirely clear why the Postal Service declined to extend the negotiating period.

It could be that the pressure of engaging in collective bargaining in an age when many politicians are attacking the process from every conceivable angle is too great—as new right-to-work fights in Indiana and Minnesota and the new assault on public-sector bargaining in Arizona demonstrate. Perhaps other external factors are restraining the ability of management to reach a reasonable deal. Or maybe management has lost faith in the ability of the parties to create a new Postal Service geared toward moving more packages and less mail while using our networks to provide new services.

Whatever the reason, we will now seek a strategically innovative contract in the mandatory mediation process. In mid-February, the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service appointed lawyer Joshua Javits to serve as a mediator to the parties. We will do all we can to use the 60-day mediation process to complete a win-win contract.

Of course, the real reason that the Postal Service declined to extend negotiations could be more political. It knows, as we know, that without action by Congress, the Postal Service faces a dire future.

The unfair burden to massively pre-fund future retiree health benefits created by Congress in 2006 is crushing the Postal Service's finances, driving an insanely counter-productive effort to downsize the Postal Service back to health. Both chambers of Congress seem to have concluded that pre-funding future retiree health benefits is the most important policy objective—not preserving an affordable universal service. Although the Senate proposal (S. 1789) is much more sensible than its House counterpart (H.R. 2309), both would eliminate Saturday delivery (sooner or later) and both would force the USPS to keep

downsizing to pay for retiree health bills decades in advance.

Thankfully, a majority of the Democratic caucus is resisting this approach. Led by Sen. Bernie Sanders, an independent, some 27 senators are pushing for major changes in the pending Senate bill. Sanders is working with Rep. Elijah Cummings in the House and the NALC to build a coalition to secure a long-term reform package that will complement our efforts at the bargaining table to create a Postal Service for the 21st century.

But we can't do it alone. We need partners. We need management partners who are committed not just to survival, but to growing the business and to setting a common goal to "own the last mile" to America's households. And we need congressional partners from both parties. GOP leaders must step up and treat postal reform as a bipartisan issue that deserves a bipartisan solution—not just another stage for ideological battle.

In the Senate, we have Sen. Susan Collins, who is almost unique in her caucus for trying to forge bipartisan postal reform. In the past, she has strongly supported six-day delivery and a fair fix to the allocation of CSRS costs. But she has few allies in her party willing to remember that the USPS serves both Red States and Blue States and involves 7.5 million private-sector jobs, not just the 550,000 jobs in the federal government.

In the House, we should have a partner in Rep. Darrell Issa, a very smart and successful businessman in his life before Congress. Yet rather than follow the lead of his GOP predecessors, Tom Davis and John McHugh in 2006 or President Nixon in 1970, by engaging the Postal Service, its unions and its customers in pro-business reform, Chairman Issa has adopted a slash-and-burn approach that will destroy far more private-sector jobs than it would federal jobs. It's a shame; we can save more jobs and preserve a great American institution if we work together.

NALC will fight the destruction of the Postal Service with all its might. But we would prefer the path of partnership. It's not too late. Let us hope that L'Enfant Plaza and Capitol Hill are listening. ☐