

# Lame duck *déjà vu* and the letter carrier way



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**A**s this issue goes to press, it is a special time in Washington, DC. I'm not speaking of the holidays, though those are right around the corner. No, I'm speaking of the lame-duck Congress.

While there was an election that brought in a slew of new members of Congress, the old Congress still has work to do. Postal reform is on the agenda, even though the House of Representatives has not passed a postal bill and the legislation that passed the Senate is deeply flawed.

Sounds like 2006, doesn't it?

**But right now it's still 2012** and once again major postal

reform is being debated during a special session of Congress that could have a major impact on every member of this union. The fate of millions of workers and hundreds of thousands of postal employees hangs in the balance.

In a perfect world, this would never happen. Congress would complete its business before the voters go to the polls so that voters could take all the relevant information into account before casting their ballots. Responsible budgets would be passed, on time. Self-inflicted "fiscal cliffs" and threatened debt defaults, the kinds of things you expect in banana republics, would not happen here. And preserving one of America's greatest institutions, the United States Postal Service, would be a no-brainer.

Sadly, we don't live in a perfect world. Instead, we live in the United States at a time when Congress has an 18 percent approval rating and one of our great national parties—the party of Abraham Lincoln, no less—has embraced a nihilistic hatred of government.

This has prevented Congress from simply repealing the retiree health pre-funding burden that is crippling the Postal Service and threatening our jobs and standard of living. It has also exposed our pensions and health benefits to cuts to help Congress balance the budget—when huge tax cuts, unpaid-for wars and a Wall Street crash caused by deregulation created the massive deficit.

In the cold, hard world we live in now, we are fighting to save tens of thousands of letter carrier jobs and to preserve a decent middle-class existence for the rest of our membership.

**In this lame-duck period, some well-meaning members** of Congress, folks whom we have supported and who fight for unions every day, are trying to negotiate with the folks who want to dismantle the Postal Service to craft an acceptable postal reform bill. Shrouded in secrecy and hidden behind closed doors, these negotiations are a mistake.

We understand that our friends are trying to help, but our message for both friends and foes has been simple: Stop!

Neither of the bills that advanced in Congress in 2012 adequately addresses the pre-funding burden or creates a viable business model for the Postal Service. They cannot serve as a sound basis of a compromise bill.

Even more importantly, ending Saturday letter mail delivery and retaining parcel delivery on Saturdays for selected metropolitan-area markets, as proposed by retiring Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-CT), is no "compromise" to build around. Cutting service, slowing the mail and giving up the Postal Service's strategic advantage in the delivery industry is not a winning business strategy. We can and must do better in 2013.

At the same time, we have joined a broad coalition of federal and postal unions to fight pension and health benefit cuts for federal and postal employees in the fiscal cliff talks. Although much of the media focus has been on the issue of taxes for the richest Americans, the fair allocation of spending cuts in 2013 is the most important part of the deal for us. The re-election of President Obama already improved the result we could expect from the fiscal cliff negotiations—a Romney tax plan would have enormously increased the spending cuts needed to reduce the deficit. But we are not out of the woods yet.

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**As I write my column in December, we can't know the** results of these important political and economic fights. But win or lose, I am exceptionally proud of the effort of the NALC's huge army of activists to fight for letter carriers and their families across America.

We have used every resource at our disposal to defend letter carrier interests and we have made our voices heard. That is the silver lining in the cloud hanging over our democracy and this *déjà vu* lame-duck Congress.

We will never give up fighting for what is right. That's the NALC way. That's the letter carrier way.