

## The latest battle is over, but a growing army of NALC activists knows the war goes on



**Fredric V. Rolando**

**T**he midterm election has come to an end—mercifully, I am sure, for those of you who have endured thousands of attack ads and countless get-out-the-vote calls or visits from NALC, among others. I want to thank the thousands of letter carriers who contributed to COLCPE, volunteered for campaigns or signed up for the Workers Voice or Labor 2014 efforts to elect letter carrier friends to federal offices this fall.

Although not all letter carriers give their jobs and their standard of living the highest priority when they vote—which is every member's absolute right—I want to thank all of you

who voted, especially those who voted for the candidates in both parties whom NALC supported this year.

**The end of campaign season is a time for reflection.** I am pleased that the number of NALC members who are willing to contribute to COLCPE, become e-Activists, visit and call their members of Congress, and organize to elect strong supporters of letter carriers has grown dramatically over the past 10 years. This growing army of activists knows the stakes: Every year, we face threats in Congress to dismantle the Postal Service by ending Saturday or door delivery, to slash our pension and health benefits and to strip away our collective-bargaining rights. The letter carriers who have stepped up to defend our jobs and our standard of living also know that these threats will not go away and that now we must educate and recruit other carriers to do their part in the future.

Of course, some members who don't vote or don't contribute to COLCPE may mistakenly think that their biweekly union dues will protect us from adversaries in Congress. But legally, union dues cannot be used for most political purposes. Others simply may be unaware that every year there is a vote on the continuation of six-day delivery and that numerous postal reform bills are introduced, some good and some truly bad.

The annual vote on six-day delivery is not just about the quality of service or the number of carrier jobs. It's about the viability of the Postal Service—if we don't deliver on Saturday, other companies will fill the void. These new competitors would lobby relentlessly to gain access

to the nation's mailboxes, first on Saturday, and then the rest of the week. The risk of deregulation and privatization would follow.

Meanwhile, the ongoing debate over postal reform provides a forum for those who want to dismantle the Postal Service or deregulate it. Without the monopoly, the USPS would be eaten alive by low-wage, no-benefit, non-union, cream-skimming competitors. Our jobs and our standard of living would be directly threatened—and the Postal Service's ability to provide universal service at affordable rates would disappear. Those of us who understand these risks must educate those who don't.

**Let me give you a recent example.** Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI) used a hearing on the Carper-Coburn postal reform bill (S. 1486) to propose placing the Postal Service in bankruptcy proceedings (for failure to pay the onerous retiree health pre-funding payments imposed by Congress in 2006). What would that actually mean? It would mean our labor contract would be voided, our paychecks would be cut, and pension and health care benefits would be open to severe reductions—*à la* the autoworkers in 2009. Fortunately, Johnson's proposal was rejected because we have helped elect enough friends to defeat it. But Johnson will be back and may even become chairman of our oversight committee if the GOP has won enough seats to take control of the Senate in the next Congress.

Of course, even if we have managed to prevent that result, the threats to the Postal Service, our collective-bargaining rights and our health and retirement benefits will keep coming. Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee Paul Ryan (R-WI) has repeatedly proposed budgets that would increase our pension contributions by 5 percent annually. That's a 5 percent pay cut—about \$100 per pay period for the typical city letter carrier. Meanwhile, recent press reports reveal that hard-right legislators in Congress will push legislation to make the withholding of union dues illegal in the federal government, the tactic used by Gov. Scott Walker to wipe out public employee unions in Wisconsin.

Voting, contributing to COLCPE and becoming an e-Activist still are the best ways for you to help us resist these assaults. That's because Congress is the battlefield, and the ballot box, money to support legislative allies and calls and visits to Congress comprise our arsenal. It is up to us. We must educate our brothers and sisters about these realities and keep growing our army of activists. The midterm battle is now over, but the political war rages on.