

# Midterms: An opportunity for NALC to stay in the political game

**O**n Tuesday, Nov. 4, millions of voters across the country will take to their local polling places to cast ballots in the midterm elections, where every House of Representatives seat is up for grabs, along with about a third of the Senate—not to mention dozens of state and local elected offices.

“As with most elections, there is so much at stake in this one for letter carriers and the country as whole,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said. “It’s a real chance for all of us to band together and do something to break the gridlock in Washington, DC, that not only has kept us from achieving the real reform the Postal Service needs to thrive in the 21st century, but also has prevented the passage of just about any sort of meaningful progressive legislation to benefit hardworking Americans.”

But since midterms lack the added sizzle of a presidential race, the turnout of eligible voters hovers around 40 percent—nearly 10 percentage points lower than in presidential election years.

“It doesn’t have to be that way this time around,” Rolando said. “Every vote matters, just as every election matters, and with so many attempts by anti-labor legislators to gut the Postal Service and to trim the pay and benefits we deserve for the work we do, it doesn’t make sense that so many active and retired letter carriers would choose to sit out any election for any reason.”

Over the last two years, for example, Congress has managed to force new postal workers to pay more toward their

retirement than their longer-tenured co-workers—without granting a proportionate raise in pay.

And just a few months ago, some on Capitol Hill floated the absurd idea of taking money away from the USPS—funds that come from customers buying postage and postal products, not from tax money—and using it to shore up the faltering Highway Trust Fund.

“Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed on that particular strategy,” Rolando said, “and thanks in part to some heavy-duty letter carrier lobbying, it was defeated. But there are plenty of other, more personal reasons for all of us to head to the polls—and to take as many eligible voters as possible along with us.”

In this year alone, the president said, letter carriers have had to lobby our representatives—twice—to preserve the appropriations language that mandates mail delivery six days a week. “And we still are fighting the Senate’s idea of postal reform under S. 1486,” Rolando said, “a bill that, if passed, would do unnecessary damage to USPS and its delivery networks, sending our employer on a downward trajectory.”

And that’s in a Senate chamber where we have a traditionally labor-friendly majority, the president said. “I doubt I have to remind members about the attacks on the Postal Service that have come from certain members of the House of Representatives,” Rolando said, such as attempts to write into law the phasing-out of door-to-door mail delivery service for homes and businesses and to legislate a shift from six-day delivery to five-day delivery.

“It’s worth noting that none

**Hawaii letter carriers got ready for the upcoming election by training at the Hawaii State Association of Letter Carriers Campaign School 2014.**

of these proposals coming out of either side of the Hill has dealt in any meaningful way with the real reason for the Postal Service’s financial problems,” the president said: “the mandate to set aside billions of dollars a year to pre-fund future retiree health benefits, something Congress has required of no other government agency or private enterprise.”

And absent pre-funding, Rolando noted, USPS would have made an operating profit so far this year of more than \$1 billion (see more below).

“So the 2014 midterm elections are no time for us to sit on the sidelines,” the president said. “And while we recognize and respect that our members have a whole host of reasons why they cast their ballots the way they do, we do ask you to factor into your vote whether the candidates you support also support you and the way of life a good postal job has afforded you.”

Rolando pointed out that time might be running out for some members to register to vote as this magazine lands in their mailboxes, while others may still have voting by mail as an option they can exercise. Visit [canivote.org](http://canivote.org) to find out how you can register, whether you can vote by mail and whether other convenient voting options are available to you.

Making sure we have as many letter carrier-friendly lawmakers in office will be crucial in helping us achieve our forward-thinking legislative goals—such as the multi-point postal reform plan that was unveiled at this summer’s convention in Philadelphia and detailed in last month’s *Postal Record*.

“Our reform strategy—which continues to gain buy-in from legislators and postal stakeholders—would accomplish what many of these other proposals would not,” Rolando said. “Our ideas would solve pre-funding, address pension inequities and promote innovation without resorting to service and job cuts. All of these would strengthen Postal Service, not dismantle it.”

This is why voting on Nov. 4 is so important, the president said. “We need all



# Officially, a Sombrotto Post Office

On Aug. 8, President Barack Obama signed into law H.R. 2291, a bill to rename New York City's Grand Central Station post office in honor of NALC President Emeritus Vincent R. Sombrotto, who died last year.

"Now that this great honor to Vince is official," NALC President Fredric Rolando said, "the Postal Service will work with Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), the bill's original sponsor, to prepare a dedication ceremony.

"It is gratifying to see this simple yet profound honor bestowed on our cherished former president," Rolando added. "A heartfelt 'thank you' goes to all NALC activists whose hard work helped make this possible." PR



members to exercise their right to vote, in this and every election, because we have seen time and again how our solidarity has made a difference in preserving our quality of life, and we know that we can extend that solidarity to the ballot box as well."

## On the record

Back in June, Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe announced a plan to close or consolidate 82 more mail processing facilities around the country next year, a move that would mean the elimination of 15,000 postal jobs and would slow mail processing throughout the nation.

In response, 50 senators signed on to a "Dear Colleague" letter dated Aug. 14 that was sent to Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) and Ranking Member Richard Shelby (R-AL), and to Financial Services and General Government Chairman Tom Udall (D-NM) and Ranking Member Mike Johanns (R-NE), asking those leaders to embrace a one-year moratorium on the closure and consolidation plan and to maintain July 2012 service standards.

NALC also is backing an effort to generate similar support for such a moratorium in the House, an effort led by Reps. Dave Joyce (R-OH), Ron Kind (D-WI), Peter King (R-NY), Peter DeFazio (D-OR), Frank LoBiondo (R-NJ), Gerry Connolly (D-VA), Michael Grimm (R-NY), Michelle Lujan Grisham (D-NM), Michael Fitzpatrick (R-PA) and Matt Cartwright (D-PA). The House letter, which is identical to the Senate letter, is also directed to House appropriators, including Appropriations Committee Chairman Hal Rogers (R-KY) and Ranking Member Nita Lowey (D-NY), Financial Services and General Government Subcommittee Chairman Ander Crenshaw (R-FL) and Ranking Member José Serrano (D-NY).

"Donahoe's ill-conceived consolidation idea would do nothing but disrupt residential and business customers from receiving timely deliveries, ultimately leading to more late deliveries and the driving away of business," President Rolando said. "Instead of embracing bad

idea after bad idea in an attempt to 'save the Postal Service,' the PMG should look at new and innovative ways to serve the public and businesses through expanded partnerships and he should work toward the elimination of the pre-funding mandate that continues to devastate the Postal Service. Until this realization is made, we will continue to see more of the same from the PMG and we will work against these needless service cuts."

In a separate move, Reps. Susan Davis (D-CA), David Joyce (R-OH) and Peter King (R-NY) on Aug. 1 introduced H. Res. 711, which calls on Congress to take all appropriate measures to ensure the continuation of door delivery for all business and residential customers.

"American businesses have already expressed their desire for keeping door-to-door delivery," President Rolando noted in an e-Activist Network message encouraging members to lobby representatives to support the resolution. "In fact, in 2013 the Postal Service introduced a voluntary cluster-box conversion program for which less than 1 percent of businesses signed up.

"H. Res. 711 is an important measure for showcasing the role of universal service to the American people," Rolando said, "so we urge every member of the House to sign on to this resolution.

"And although none of these resolutions or letters carries the actual force of law," he added, "remember that they are extremely important in getting members of Congress on the record as supporting our legislative goals, something that can really help us when the time comes for us to ask for their backing on measures such as our multi-point reform plan."

## Positive mail trends boost Q3 numbers

On Aug. 11, USPS released its financial report for the third quarter of Fiscal Year 2014, a period covering April, May and June. The figures showed a total operating profit of more than \$1 billion for the first three quar-

ters of Fiscal Year 2014, a continuation of the operating profitability trend that started in October 2012. The third quarter also saw mail revenue rise by \$424 million.

"This positive performance by the Postal Service is driven by two underlying trends," President Rolando noted. "First, as the economy improves, letter mail revenue is growing. Second, as more people shop online, package revenue is skyrocketing.

"The Internet is now a net positive for the Postal Service, auguring well for the future as e-commerce grows," Rolando said. "In the third quarter, which the Postal Service's CFO called 'a very good quarter in a lot of ways,' package revenue rose 6.6 percent, standard mail revenue rose 5.1 percent and first-class mail revenue was up 3.2 percent."

As usual, the president said, the red ink at USPS is attributable chiefly to pre-funding, a \$5.6 billion annual charge. But another factor this quarter was an adjustment in workers' compensation interest rates.

"Given these positive mail trends," Rolando said, "it would be irresponsible to degrade services to Americans and their businesses, which would drive away mail—and revenue—and stop the postal turnaround in its tracks."

The president again called on lawmakers to fix the pre-funding fiasco and to preserve and strengthen the profitable postal networks. "Our networks are the future of the Postal Service as it increasingly delivers not just six but seven days a week," he said.

## In the news media

Ahead of the Postal Service's Aug. 11 release of its third quarter financial report, *The Washington Post* took a look at how USPS has been doing so far. The story referred to the "continued turnaround" of the agency, noted how its "recent improvement" is due largely to increases in package delivery, and called pre-funding "one of the biggest drags on USPS finances."



## 'Wounded warriors' bill introduced in House

Another measure the NALC is watching is one it fully supports: the Wounded Warriors Federal Leave Act, H.R. 5229.

This bipartisan bill, which is making its way through Capitol Hill, is designed to give newly hired postal and federal employees who also are disabled veterans 104 hours of leave time to seek medical treatment for their service-related disabilities during their first year in the workforce. The bill also would prevent such workers from being forced to take unpaid leave to keep medical appointments.

"The Postal Service is the largest civilian employer of military veterans," NALC President Fredric Rolando said, "and one quarter of our members have proudly served our country in the military. This bill is another step in the right direction to thank these brave men and women for their service."

Under current law, full-time federal employees accrue four hours of sick leave for each bi-weekly pay period, for a maximum of 104 hours, or 13 days, of annual sick leave. However, federal employees in their first year on the job begin their federal government careers with a zero sick-leave balance. As a result, disabled veterans who have recently entered the federal workforce often do not have sufficient sick leave accrued to allow them to seek regular treatment for their service-connected disabilities.

Under H.R. 5229, first-year employees with a service-connected disability rating of 30 percent or greater would be given 104 hours of leave to obtain medical treatment for their disabilities. Employees also would submit certification to their agencies in accordance with Office of Personnel Management guidelines. (The legislation does not allow for any portion of the 104 hours to be carried over to the following year.) **PR**

Much of the news media coverage of USPS' quarterly report focused on Donahoe's statements about losses, something that was also reflected in most headlines. Those stories, though, also noted gains in postal revenue and the improving mail picture. Some stories went so far as to focus on the improved revenue and explaining how pre-funding is the reason for USPS' red ink.

NALC President Fredric Rolando seemed to be the most-quoted person in the news coverage (after the postmaster general and USPS CFO Joseph Corbett)—a fact that helps get NALC's position out to readers, listeners and viewers:

- *The New York Times* targeted pre-funding in the first paragraph of its story and focused on the positive parts of the quarterly report, even while getting in USPS' negative picture. It quoted only Donahoe and Rolando—mostly Rolando.
- *The Wall Street Journal* had a reasonable story that included negative quotes from USPS but also cited positive postal trends, singling out pre-funding. It gave a more space to Rolando than Corbett, the only other person quoted.
- *The Washington Post's* coverage of the report started with a lot of the negatives before it improved. It quoted Rolando, along with Corbett, Donahoe, Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE) and Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA).
- The *Richmond [VA] Times-Dispatch* reported positive news early on and included comments from Rolando, the only person named in the story.
- *Government Executive* gave lots of attention to the improving revenue picture, to the operating profit and to the reason for the red ink. Of the three people quoted, the story gave as much space to Rolando as to Corbett and Donahoe combined.
- The Associated Press's error-filled

story quoted Rolando at greater length than Corbett. The agency later issued a correction to its initial story.

- Similarly, Reuters' story had some mistakes in it. It led with USPS' negative line, though it also noted positive postal developments, and it quoted only Rolando and Corbett. The news agency also issued a correction to its initial story.
- *The Hill* included many positive developments but also the USPS' negative spin, quoting only Rolando, Corbett and Donahoe.
- *Federal Times* cited this quarter's \$10 million operating profit (along with the \$1 billion year to date), and its longest quote was from Rolando.

Elsewhere, in the Aug. 9 *Portland Press Herald*, President Rolando informed readers of Maine's largest newspaper why the red ink at the Postal Service has nothing to do with the mail service that folks in Maine and elsewhere rely on and deserve.

Sioux City, IA Branch 69 President Eddie Lofland's letter to the editor of the *Sioux City Journal* ran on Aug. 6. Lofland's similar letter to the editor of Sioux Falls, SD's *Argus Leader*—the biggest newspaper in South Dakota—ran on Aug. 15.

In a promising indicator that our message is getting out to the news media, a story in the Aug. 5 *Wall Street Journal* about how UPS and FedEx use the Postal Service for last-mile package delivery noted that "USPS has generated about \$1 billion in operating profit so far this year."

An Aug 14 editorial in Raleigh, NC's *News & Observer* railed against pre-funding, calling it the "real threat to USPS." It referred to the congressional mandate as "a curiosity" and further said that "The requirement needs to be lifted to give USPS a chance to rebound..." and, later on, that USPS "...has to be relieved of a congressional anchor that might sink it." The *News & Observer* is the second-largest newspaper in the least-unionized state in the country. **PR**