

Fighting ‘Fast Track’ and other legislative actions



NALC President Fredric Rolando answered members' questions during a rap session held on April 16.

As this issue of *The Postal Record* was being prepared, Congress was heading back to Washington after its spring recess. A key issue of concern to letter carriers and the entire labor movement was the introduction of so-called “Fast Track” legislation.

“Any trade deal is going to have a huge impact on America’s workers,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said. “But if Congress allows trade deals to be fast-tracked, it would let these deals be negotiated behind closed doors, their details shielded from the public scrutiny.”

Worse, the president said, once these deals come up for consideration, Fast Track would allow Congress only to give them up-or-down votes, without the opportunity for any discussion, consideration or amendments.

“Fast Track is undemocratic,” Rolando said. “Deals approved this way almost exclusively eliminate jobs and benefit corporations and the rich.”

If two such deals being negotiated now were to be fast-tracked, they could directly threaten letter carrier jobs and USPS’ affordable universal service: the World Trade Organization-sponsored trade in services agreement (TISA) and the U.S.-European Union Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (T-TIP).

“In both negotiations, the Europeans are calling for the United States to phase out the Postal Service’s monopoly on the delivery of letter mail—a policy adopted by the EU between 1992 and 2011,” Rolando wrote in his “President’s Message” column in last month’s *Postal Record* (available online at nalc.org). “In other words, both the T-TIP and the TISA are direct threats to our jobs and our system of affordable universal service.”

The president also noted in that column that if Fast Track gets approved, it might be followed by a quick vote on the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a trade deal that could spell the end of efforts

to let the Postal Service pursue the offering of basic financial services—leaving 68 million Americans unbanked and at the mercy of predatory payday lenders.

In an April 15 rally on Capitol Hill, Rolando joined members of Congress and leaders of other national organizations to speak out against Fast Track.

“Our message to all 535 members of Congress is the same,” he said at the rally: “We strongly oppose Fast Track authority, and we expect every one of you to vote against it.”

“We’ve all seen this movie before,” he said. “Big business and Wall Street banks push secret, anti-democratic deals to protect the investor rights of multinational companies, under the banner of ‘free trade.’ And they promise rising wages and millions of jobs.

“But what we get,” Rolando said, “is outsourcing, wage stagnation and ballooning trade deficits.”

This is why Congress shouldn’t trust those who want to bring up under fast-track rules free trade agreements that don’t allow for democratic amendment or review, the president said.

“Enough is enough,” he said. “America’s letter carriers are ready to fight. The first step to rebuilding the middle class is defeating another round of devastating trade deals.”

After this magazine went to press, the NALC also was gearing up to join the





AFL-CIO and its coalition of partners for a nationwide day of action against Fast Track on Saturday, April 18.

You can learn more about the negative impact of Fast Track legislation at nofasttrack.com.

Rolando rebuts Brookings' claims

“The U.S. Postal Service and private delivery firms aren’t unmitigated rivals; they’re often partners.”

So wrote President Rolando in an April 1 letter to the editor of *The Washington Post*, rebutting some misleading statements contained in a paper by economist Robert Shapiro that was discussed at the Brookings Institution, a Washington, DC, policy research firm.

Shapiro’s report, which was covered by the *Post* as well as several other news outlets, claimed that USPS’ tax-exempt status and its mailbox monopoly tip the economic scales in the agency’s favor when comparing USPS with UPS and FedEx.

“Private carriers now bring millions of packages to post offices for last-mile delivery,” President Rolando wrote, “saving themselves and their customers money via the Postal Service’s

unmatched networks.”

Still a priority, Rolando wrote, is repairing the financial damage to USPS caused by the 2006 requirement that it set aside, over a 10-year period, about \$5.6 billion a year to pre-fund the health benefits of future postal retirees. But the president pointed out that the Postal Service’s unions have a lot of other ideas for moving the agency forward.

“While this unfair \$5.6 billion annual charge, required of no other entity, must be addressed, we’ve proposed and supported other ideas,” he wrote, listing examples such as expanding Sunday or same-day delivery using private partnerships with local stores, as well as allowing companies to use space at postal plants to store products close to customers and then have letter carriers deliver them.

“Financially, the Postal Service is mounting a dramatic comeback,” Rolando wrote. “With an improving economy sparking increases in letter revenue and online shopping boosting package revenue, the Postal Service had an operating profit of \$1.4 billion in fiscal 2014; already in fiscal 2015, operations are \$1.4 bil-

lion in the black.”

The *Post*’s March 30 story about Shapiro’s paper also quoted a statement by Postal Service spokesman David Partenheimer, who pointed out that the agency has a mission to “provide universal service to the American people, an obligation that is not imposed on private delivery firms.”

H.R. 1230: Another attempt to cut federal workers’ benefits

Federal employee retirement benefits—including those of letter carriers—are based on your highest three years of salary (better known as a “high-3”). But a bill introduced in March by Rep. Bruce Westerman (R-AR) calls for changing the formula to the five highest years of salary.

“This sounds like just another attempt to use federal employee benefits to fix financial problems that federal employees did not create,” President Rolando said.

Over the last four years, he noted, Congress has authorized cuts in federal employee wages and benefits amounting to nearly \$159 billion.

“It’s past the time for Congress to stop using hardworking public



Members of Congress representing Ohio spoke at a congressional reception held on March 24 for a delegation of letter carriers from the Buckeye State. Pictured from left are: Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D), Rep. Marcia Fudge (D), Rep. Dave Joyce (R), Rep. Bill Johnson (R) and Rep. Joyce Beatty (D).

servants' benefits as a 'piggy bank,' " Rolando said. "Westerman's Government Employee Pension Reform Act is a bad piece of legislation."

Status of pro-postal legislation

At press time, Rep. Rosa DeLauro's (D-CT) H.R. 784, Protect Overnight Delivery Act, had 76 co-sponsors from both parties. It calls for returning USPS' service standards to Dec. 30, 2011, levels.

Rep. David McKinley's (R-WV) H.Res. 54 calls for restoration of service standards to the July 1, 2012, levels. It had 124 co-sponsors at press time.

H.Res. 12, Rep. Sam Graves' (R-MO) measure calling for preservation of six-day mail delivery, had 161 co-sponsors.

Rep. Susan Davis' (D-CA) H.Res. 28, calling for continuation of door delivery of mail for all residential and commercial customers, had 101 co-sponsors.

Automatic voter registration now law in Oregon

On March 16, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown (D) signed into law a measure that will automatically register a resi-

dent to vote if a transaction between that resident and the state's Department of Motor Vehicles was recorded any time after 2013.

"The new law is a major win for voters and the Postal Service," President Rolando said, noting that Oregon is a 100 percent vote-by-mail state. It is estimated that this law will add 300,000 voters to the state's rolls, generating hundreds of thousands of new pieces of mail.

"Voting by mail is one of the most effective and secure ways to increase electoral participation," Rolando said. "The NALC looks forward to helping deliver ballots to tens of thousands of new Beaver State voters."

In the news media

President Rolando had a commentary piece in the April 4 *Santa Monica Mirror*, which serves that suburb of Los Angeles. The letter complemented an earlier column that the paper ran about USPS closing historic post offices because of the pre-funding mandate.

On Sunday, March 29, Rolando had an op-ed in the *Idaho State Journal*. This piece explained the absurd nature of the pre-funding mandate, the counter-productive nature of proposed service cuts, and the need for people in Idaho to make their voices heard.

The *Schenectady [NY] Daily Gazette* on April 10 ran Northeastern New York Branch 358 President **Bill Cook's** letter to the editor, pointing out the financial damage the Postal Service has endured thanks to pre-funding.

Spokane, WA Branch 442 letter carrier **Mike Rapp's** letter to the editor of *The Spokesman-Review*—in support of Rep. DeLauro's Overnight Delivery Act—ran on April 8.

On March 30, Rep. Steve King (R-IA) got a behind-the-scenes look at a day in the life of a letter carrier, at the invitation of Iowa State Association Vice President **Herb Copley** and members of Mason City Branch 471. The visit was covered by KIMT-TV, which serves North Central Iowa and Southeastern Minnesota.

Idaho State Association President **John Paige's** letter to the editor of the *Idaho Statesman* was in that paper's March 29 edition.

On March 20, the *Napa Valley [CA] Register* ran a story about Napa Branch 627 letter carrier **E.J. Aguarin**, who was honored for helping a customer on his route.

Waupaca, WI Branch 1298 President **Howard Pope's** March 12 letter to the editor of the *Waupaca County Post* made note of the convenience of no-excuses absentee-balloting by mail. **PR**

NALC members from Maryland, Virginia and Washington, DC, attended a rap session with President Rolando on April 16 before lobbying their members of Congress.

