

The GOP budget: Don't read it and weep— read it and take action



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The Postal Service is one of the oldest institutions in the United States, has well served the American public with the best service for the lowest cost in the Western world, and is even enshrined in the U.S. Constitution. Yet, there are those in Congress who want to destroy it.

As we've seen time and again in proposed legislation, they want to gut it to the point where it will be incapable of doing the necessary and fundamental work that the country's citizens and businesses expect of it.

We need our allies to stand with us and fight, and that means members of Congress who are willing to not only protect the USPS and its employees from proposals that would destroy the network or strip away our rights and benefits, but also to address the crippling pre-funding burden. Make no mistake: We have friends in Congress, from both political parties, who are willing to stand with us. But to turn the tide, we need more allies, and that is where your efforts are desperately needed.

The essential elements of any battle in the halls of Congress are money and activism. We do not use dues money for political purposes, which is why letter carriers contribute to our political action fund, COLCPE—to support those in Congress who stand with us. Letter carriers also join the e-Activist Network so they can be alerted when it is necessary to mobilize or contact their members of Congress.

For anyone who thinks it doesn't matter who wins elections, look no further than the budget resolutions adopted by the House and Senate last month. They contain an all-out assault on federal and postal employees, this time from the Senate as well as the House. How does a \$3,500 pay cut sound to you? That's what the typical city letter carrier would lose (about \$135 per paycheck) if Congress adopted legislation to implement a proposal in the non-binding budget resolution. That proposal would hike employee contributions for CSRS and FERS pensions by

6 percent of pay—to reduce the government's share and save agencies money.

How about a proposal to raise your share of health care premiums from 23 percent to 28 percent next year? Or to slash your FERS pension benefits (despite the higher contributions) between the age of 55 and 62? A brand-new proposal showed up this year—to slash the interest earnings on the Government Bond Fund (G Fund) of the Thrift Savings Plan to effectively zero percent next year. And perhaps most dangerously, the budget resolutions endorse turning the Federal Employees Health Benefit Program into a “premium support” program—replacing our good insurance program with vouchers for private health insurance that would not keep up with medical inflation over time. This 401(k)-style health plan would massively shift costs onto our backs.

Now you may think President Obama would never sign a budget with these radical proposals. To that, I say: Let us hope so, but don't be too sure. To avert a government shutdown in 2011, the president signed the Budget Control Act, which forced career city carriers hired after 2012 to take pay cuts of between 2.3 percent and 3.6 percent—and which will cost them tens of thousands of dollars over their careers.

These are the real threats we face and this is the reason we cannot bury our heads in the sand and pretend that political engagement doesn't matter. It does.

Of course, I suspect that members who read my message every month are probably among the many letter carriers who give to COLCPE and are signed up as e-Activists. For that, I thank you. But we owe it to the rest of our members to make sure they are aware of the risks to our jobs and benefits, and to the organization as a whole. I have found that nothing works better than one-on-one conversations and consistent and determined effort.

NALC members of all political parties must mobilize in this battle. We need to not only grow the number of members of Congress who stand with us on Saturday delivery and the other postal issues, but to also expand that support to resist these proposed budget cuts. We know there is strong bipartisan backing for a healthy Postal Service; we need that same support for the employees who make it strong.

Remember, our issues are not about Democratic or Republican views, but about strengthening and preserving the Postal Service for all Americans.