

To endorse or not, that is the question



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“Politicians and diapers need to be changed frequently,” Mark Twain once observed, “and for the same reason.” Perhaps he was a tad bit cynical, but Twain’s funny line reminds us—if the round-the-clock cable blather has not already done so—that it soon will be time to pick a new president.

The 2016 presidential race is in full swing, with no fewer than 17 Republican candidates and at least five Democratic candidates. More so than most Americans, letter carriers have a lot riding on the 2016 election. After all, the president of the United States appoints the

Postal Service’s Board of Governors, names its regulators, decides who administers our pension and health insurance programs and decides, with Congress, whether we have jobs, benefits and/or collective-bargaining rights.

So letter carriers, and the NALC, have a major interest in who gets elected to the White House. As we have in the past, we must decide whether to endorse a candidate for president. To be more specific, we have to decide who is the best candidate for active and retired letter carriers (when it comes to our interests as workers and annuitants at least) who can actually win the 2016 general election.

With 22 candidates to choose from, it may seem a little bit overwhelming. But there are some intriguing possibilities. First, of course, there is former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton—who is also a former New York senator and a former First Lady of the United States. She was a champion of letter carriers and the Employee Free Choice Act as a senator, and she won the NALC’s endorsement when she competed against President Obama for the Democratic Party’s nomination in 2008. Nobody who attended the 2008 NALC convention in Boston will ever forget her sensational speech to our delegates. Then there is Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, perhaps the single greatest friend we have in the United States Senate today—a staunch ally who helped us defeat multiple bills that would have dismantled the Postal Service. In the end, we may not wish to pick among friends—or we may look to others seeking the party’s nomination—but either way, we have at least two great friends running on the Democratic side.

On the Republican side, we have a son of a letter carrier running for president, Gov. John Kasich of Ohio. His record when he was in Congress was none-too-friendly to us, and he tried (and failed) to strip public employees in Ohio of their collective-bargaining rights, but he does talk warmly and respectfully about the work his father did for the Post Office and his community. That’s a start. Mike Huckabee, the former governor of Arkansas, is openly seeking labor support—in fact, he was the only GOP candidate to fill out the AFL-CIO’s candidate survey and he came to the federation’s most recent Executive Council meeting. Meanwhile, former Texas Gov. Rick Perry has been a strong defender of six-day mail delivery, even if he has not shown much love for unions. Should a Republican candidate seek and, more importantly, earn our endorsement for the GOP primaries, we will offer it.

We will take our time making our decisions about the 2016 election. And we will follow a process that has worked well for NALC in the past: We will survey the candidates on letter carrier issues, report the results to the membership, inform the members about the electability of the candidates, and then ask the members to express their preferences on whether, and whom, to endorse.

In fact, we already have begun that process. As I told the participants at the Houston rap session, we have prepared a detailed questionnaire on the issues most important to active and retired letter carriers and have mailed them to all announced candidates, Democratic and Republican alike. We will collect their views on the role of the Postal Service in the 21st century, how to reduce the burden of retiree health pre-funding, the security of federal and postal workers’ benefits, the collective-bargaining rights of private and public employees, and their legislative proposals on Social Security and Medicare. The completed questionnaires are due by Sept. 15. We will carefully review the results and invite those candidates who want our endorsement to meet with us, and then report to the members on the candidates’ views on our issues.

At the moment, we are considering various ways to solicit the preferences of the NALC membership. At times, the delegates to our national conventions have decided whom to endorse. That may not make sense for this election since our mid-August convention will come very late in the process. We may, as we have done in the past, use postcard ballots in *The Postal Record* to allow our members to identify their choices, or we may use a more scientific poll to get the broadest, most accurate reading of the membership on this issue. We will announce the method in the fall.

Mark Twain may have been cynical about politics, but we cannot afford to be. Letter carriers must be actively involved in next year’s campaign, no matter which candidate or candidates we decide to endorse. Our jobs and futures depend on it.