



# Making postal progress at the state, local levels

**S**ince letter carriers work for a federal agency, it's no surprise that the bulk of our advocacy work is focused on the nation's capital. Many letter carriers come to Washington, DC, to lobby Congress, with thousands more writing letters or making phone calls from home. But not all of the legislative action is in Washington. State and local policies can affect letter carriers, too, while local activities may put pressure on federal decision-makers.

Some activist carriers have demonstrated the importance of local action lately. Their stories should inspired carriers elsewhere to do their part.

## It's official: Floridians may 'vote by mail'

Like many states, Florida allows voters to vote with a no-excuse absentee ballot through the mail. Historically, the term "absentee ballot" has been considered misleading because anyone can request a ballot by mail in the Sunshine State; however, voters in many states traditionally have had to provide some type of justification to qualify for absentee voting.

Florida letter carriers helped convince the state legislature to pass a bill replacing the term "absentee ballot" with "vote by mail," making it clear that voting by mail is not just for those who might be out of town on Election Day, but for anyone who wishes to vote by mail.

"Many people thought they'd be breaking the law" by using an absentee ballot just to vote by mail, State Legislative Liaison **Kevin Byrne** of West Palm Beach, FL Branch 1690 said. "We decided that instead of trying to persuade our current legis-

lature to pass an entirely vote-by-mail initiative, similar to Oregon, we would start off slowly by simply having them change the name from 'absentee ballot' to 'vote by mail.' "

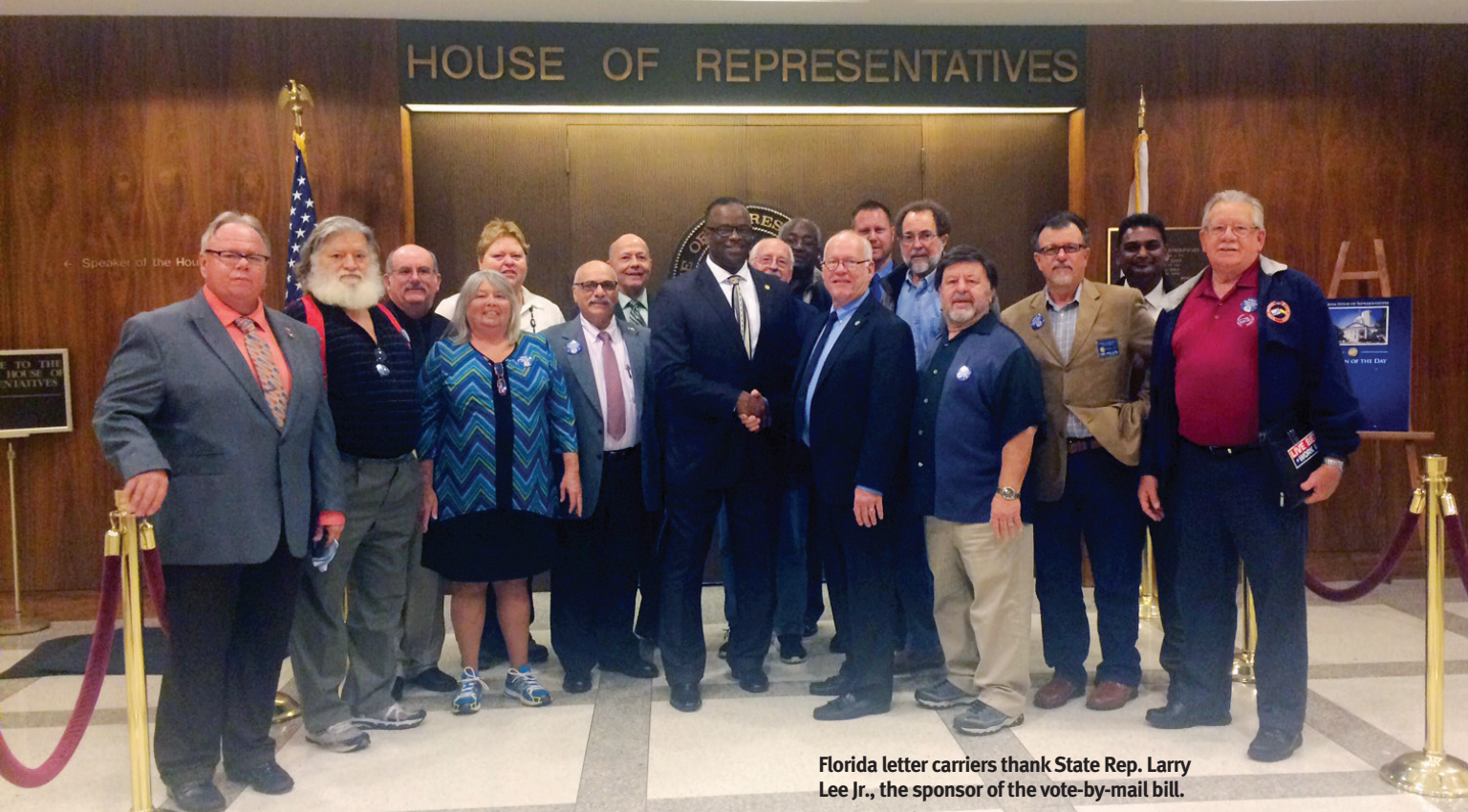
Working with many Florida NALC branches, the Florida AFL-CIO and other partners, Byrne and the Florida State Association successfully lobbied the state legislature to amend official literature with the new term. This simple, inexpensive change could lead many voters to use the mail to vote, and perhaps to participate in elections in which they wouldn't have voted at all.

Byrne and many other volunteer letter carriers met with members of the legislature, spoke at committee hearings and worked with county executives to help get the bill passed. Byrne recalled walking the halls of the legislators' offices in Tallahassee. Letter carrier that he is, Byrne had organized the offices by office building and floor on a worksheet.

The Florida letter carriers had tried in past years to get similar legislation passed, but many legislators were afraid of any bill that made changes to voting procedures, no matter how minor. This year, Byrne said, carriers' efforts bore fruit thanks to the approval of the group representing local officials who oversee elections. "The key to this process was getting the support of the supervisors of elections," he said.

Byrne contacted every election supervisor in the state and met with a few in person, asking for their support. The supervisors later unanimously endorsed the bill. When state legislators learned that election supervisors did not oppose the change, convincing





Florida letter carriers thank State Rep. Larry Lee Jr., the sponsor of the vote-by-mail bill.

lawmakers to sign on was easy.

The Florida carriers also assured that the bill had bipartisan support early in the process. **Shane Ulbin** of Central Florida Branch 1091 recalls asking a Democratic senator who co-sponsored the bill to suggest a key Republican in the House to recruit to the cause. The Republican House member “was nervous about it at first,” Ulbin said, “but when the bill passed the Senate, he was the first co-sponsor on the House side, and that was important. It helped get it on track in the House.”

The bill eventually sailed through both houses with unanimous support from both sides of the aisle in February, and Republican Gov. Rick Scott signed the bill soon thereafter. The new law will take effect July 1.

### Ready for anything in Utah

A meeting in Washington, DC, led to a bill being passed in the Utah legislature that could boost the partnership between letter carriers and emergency responders—and at the same time strengthen the relationship with a powerful congressional committee chairman.

Utah letter carriers, including Utah State Association President **Phil Rodriquez** of Salt Lake City Branch

111, met early last year with Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R) after he was named chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, a committee with jurisdiction over the Postal Service. The idea of Utah’s emergency officials using the postal network after natural disasters or other emergencies emerged from the meeting.

State officials formed a task force that included emergency agency representatives, Rodriquez and Utah State Association State Legislative Liaison **Chad Mortensen** of Branch 111 to talk about how the postal network, and letter carriers’ personal knowledge of and relationships with their customers, could help in large emergencies.

“They had no idea what we do; they had no idea how they could utilize our network,” Rodriquez said. “Their eyes popped out of their heads.”

A state senator who was in the meeting with Chaffetz intro-

duced a bill in the Utah state legislature authorizing the task force to issue a formal report exploring possible connections between the Postal Service and Utah emergency responders. Some postal-specific tasks might include, for example, identifying damaged structures, identifying people in damaged areas and determining whether emergency assistance is needed.

The bill passed the state legislature in February, and at press time was awaiting approval by Republican Gov. Gary Herbert, who was expected to sign it. The measure calls for the report to be completed by Nov. 30.



NALC activists in Utah met with State Sen. Karen Mayne and convinced her to sponsor legislation in her state.





Senate Joint Resolution No. 11

CHAPTER 183

Relative to the United States Postal Service.

[ Filed with Secretary of State September 18, 2015. ]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SJR 11, Leyva, United States Postal Service.

This measure would urge the United States Congress to require the United States Postal Service to take all appropriate measures to restore service standards in effect as of July 1, 2012, would urge Congress to place a moratorium on planned shutdowns of mail sorting centers, and would urge Congress to oppose any postal reform legislation that does not continue the mandate for 6-day delivery service or protect door-to-door delivery as it currently exists. The measure would also urge the Secretary of State to publicly oppose changes in the United States Postal Service that negatively impact the rights of California voters who vote by an absentee ballot.

Fiscal Committee: yes

WHEREAS, On January 5, 2015, the United States Postal Service implemented lower "service standards" to virtually eliminate overnight delivery of first class mail and periodicals, and further delay most other mail; and

WHEREAS, Delayed mail negatively impacts businesses, hurts residents, communities, and the economy, and drives customers away, resulting in lower revenue and damaging the financial situation of the United States Postal Service; and

WHEREAS, Robust service standards implemented by the United States Postal Service are essential to providing prompt and timely delivery of all mail, including online purchases, local newspapers, newsletters, bill payments, letters, invitations, packages, and medicines; and

WHEREAS, Planned shutdowns of mail sorting centers would seriously affect hundreds of employees, over 22 percent of whom are United States military veterans, many with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, At least one of these mail sorting facilities, located in Eureka, California, is planning on shifting its mail distribution, including absentee ballots, to Oregon, which contradicts the obligation of the United States Postal Service to protect voting by mail throughout California, which is now commonplace and will remain essential to our democracy; and

WHEREAS, The United States Postal Service has the authority to reinstate overnight delivery standards to hasten mail delivery and prevent shutdowns of mail sorting centers; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate and the Assembly of the State of California, jointly, That the Legislature urges the United States Congress to require the United States Postal Service to restore service standards in effect as of July 1, 2012, and place a moratorium on planned shutdowns of mail sorting centers, and further urges the United States Congress to oppose any postal reform legislation that does not continue the mandate for six-day delivery service or does not protect door-to-door delivery as it currently exists; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature urges the Secretary of State to publicly oppose changes in the United States Postal Service that negatively impact the rights of California voters who vote by an absentee ballot; and be it further

Resolved, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of this resolution to each Senator and Representative from California in the Congress of the United States, to the Secretary of State, to the United States Postmaster General, and to the author for appropriate distribution.

Left: The text of the resolution enacted by the California legislature.

Right: California letter carriers thank State Sen. Connie Leyva (l).



of communication between NALC and Chaffetz, a member of Congress from a generally conservative state, and other Utah legislators.

"This highlights the power of activism at the lowest levels," Rodriguez said. "It can lead to activism at higher levels."

## Standing up for six-day, door delivery in California

Last fall, California letter

carriers worked from the ground up to help convince the state legislature to pass a resolution supporting six-day delivery and door-to-door delivery.

Before approaching lawmakers in the state capital, carriers from branches throughout the most populous state in the union went to their local government officials to push for similar resolutions. Soon, 60 cities and counties, large and small, had adopted resolutions calling for preserving door delivery six days a week.

"It increases the awareness of what we are going through" in the struggle to preserve mail service, said California State Association President John Beaumont. The local-level strategy also gave carriers a platform, he said, since many presented before city council meetings attended by concerned local citizens. "It allowed us to speak in front of many people," Beaumont said. "People start asking

all sorts of questions, and pretty soon you have a groundswell of support."

The effort was especially useful for spreading the word to the public about efforts by USPS to replace door delivery with cluster-box delivery. "That's the one thing people don't seem to know very much about," Beaumont said.

"The local resolutions were our base," he said, "and we took that to Sacramento." The California State Association teamed with local American Postal Workers Union (APWU) members to lobby for a state resolution to oppose any postal reform legislation that does not continue the mandate for six-day delivery service, to protect door-to-door delivery as it currently exists, to restore USPS service standards in effect as of July 1, 2012, and to place a moratorium on planned shutdowns of mail sorting centers.

The resolution also urged California's secretary of state to publicly oppose changes in the U.S. Postal Service that negatively affect the rights of California voters who vote by an absentee ballot.

The measure (Senate Joint Resolution 11) was introduced last May and adopted by both houses of the legislature in September. It was then sent to all members of Congress and the postmaster general.

"The efforts by carriers in Florida, Utah, California and other states are essential parts of NALC's effort to get our message to decision-makers and the public and to build support for the postal mission," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "Their work helps communities understand what we do and why it is important in their lives, and that positively influences the national discussion about the future of the Postal Service." **PR**

During consideration and preparation of this bill, a number of supporters spoke in its favor, including local NALC members, representatives from the American Postal Workers Union, U.S. Postal Service representatives, emergency personnel and members of other coalition groups and representatives from Chaffetz' office.

The federal government had already begun to prepare letter carriers to act as a resource in natural disasters through the Cities' Readiness Initiative, a 2011-2012 pilot program that was designed to help major cities increase their ability to respond to bioterrorism and other threats. The Utah task force has led to interest in other states and with federal agencies to discuss new ways of relying on letter carriers in emergencies, Rodriguez said.

Working on this non-partisan issue also has opened new channels