

The third time is not the charm



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For the third time since the creation of the Postal Service, our country could be on the verge of a great debate about the ownership of the agency. On June 21, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), a unit of the White House that sets policy and budgets for the president, issued a report titled “Delivering Government Solutions in the 21st Century” that called for “restructuring the Postal Service.” The report strongly hints that the Trump administration will advocate “preparing the USPS for future conversion from a government agency into a privately-held corporation” when its postal task force (see my column in the July *Postal Record*) issues its report, which was due soon af-

ter this issue of the magazine went to press.

Even though the Postal Service has the highest approval rating of any federal agency (88 percent), which shows that the public overwhelmingly supports it, and even though the U.S. businesses that most rely on the Postal Service oppose privatization, President Trump’s top economic advisors appear to want to have this debate again. While we view this as a major distraction from the more sensible solutions we presented to the White House Task Force, my first reaction was: Bring it on; NALC is ready to lead the opposition.

We’ve been down this same road twice since postal reorganization. So before addressing our plans to resist privatization, it might be useful to remind ourselves of previous debates on this issue. In the early 1980s, President Reagan appointed a commission to study government “waste and inefficiency” led by conservative businessman J. Peter Grace. That commission criticized the efficiency of the Postal Service and led a number of think tanks to call for its privatization. One of them was led by James Miller III, who was subsequently appointed by President Reagan to serve as his OMB director. Legislation to privatize the Postal Service was introduced in Congress, and NALC President Vincent R. Sombrotto led the fight against it. NALC issued a booklet called *The Case Against Privatization* and President Sombrotto went on a media blitz to speak out against the idea. He even debated Miller (who later was appointed chairman of the USPS Board of Governors by President George W. Bush) on CNN’s “Crossfire” program. The privatization legislation was deeply unpopular and never made it out of committee in the House of Representatives.

The privatization issue resurfaced in late 2002, when President Bush appointed a blue ribbon commission to study the

future of the Postal Service. The bipartisan commission held hearings over several months and, once again, conservative think tanks pushed their privatization agenda. NALC President William H. Young testified before the commission, making the case for retaining public ownership and opposing deregulation of the postal market in the United States. NALC also submitted several reports to rebut misleading or inaccurate claims by the libertarian proponents of privatization. Although we did not welcome all of the commission’s findings and recommendations, its final report (“Embracing the Future: Making the Tough Choices to Preserve Universal Mail Service”) rejected privatization and deregulation. Once again, Congress rejected privatization.

Now it is our turn to make the case against privatization, a case that is as strong as ever. USPS is a vital part of our national economic infrastructure. It binds the country together economically, politically and culturally. It is the only truly universal communications network we have and, in the age of e-commerce, it is more important economically than ever. Tens of millions of Americans and millions of U.S. businesses would suffer disastrous consequences if the Postal Service were privatized.

We’re already working to beat back this terrible idea. When we were in Detroit for the 71st Biennial Convention, our legislative team was working around the clock with Democratic and Republican allies in the House of Representatives to draft and introduce an important House resolution (H. Res 993) opposing privatization of the USPS. (See story on page 8.) In the weeks that followed, our grassroots network of activists began contacting their members of Congress to support the resolution, with excellent initial results: The number of cosponsors climbed from eight to 80 in just a couple of weeks. Our goal is to get a majority of representatives to come out against privatization by backing the resolution, just as majorities have backed resolutions to preserve Saturday and door delivery (H. Res. 15 and H. Res. 28).

We didn’t stop there: When Rep. Patrick McHenry (R-NC) tried to insert a ban on postal banking in the Financial Services and General Government appropriation bill during the convention, we mobilized 28 Republicans to join the entire Democratic caucus to defeat the amendment. This is the type of bipartisan coalition we need to engage and grow to once again win the fight against privatization.

As part of our ongoing mission to protect active and retired members of NALC, we will continue to work with mailer allies, other postal unions and the broad coalition of civil society groups that make up A Grand Alliance to Save the Public Postal Service to combat any negative proposals that might emerge from the White House Task Force on the Postal Service. Two prior generations of NALC members have won this battle before. Now it’s our turn.