

# NALC delivers the union message to the White House



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**A**s I reported in this space last month, the Trump administration's task force on the Postal Service offers both an opportunity and a threat. I emphasized our low expectations, given the genesis of the task force and its makeup, but vowed to proceed in good faith to engage with the administration's policymakers. That is precisely what we did on June 5, when we met at the Treasury Department with officials from Treasury, the Office of Management and Budget, the Office of Personnel Management and other agencies.

In preparation for the meeting, NALC drafted a comprehensive white paper on the Postal Service, outlining our views on the chal-

lenges we face and providing a variety of postal policy options. We then worked with the other three postal unions—the American Postal Workers Union, the National Postal Mail Handlers Union and the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association—to gain their support for the white paper and offered it on behalf of the entire unionized workforce of the Postal Service. The white paper and related materials provided to the task force are posted on the NALC website at [nalc.org/news/white-paper](http://nalc.org/news/white-paper).

**As it turned out, the white paper served to set the agenda** for our discussions with the White House team in June. We went through it in detail, starting with our general observations and ending with a discussion of alternative policies to those proposed by H.R. 756 and S. 2629, which have essentially stalled in Congress as a result of opposition to the increased Medicare spending they would cause. I will not go into these alternatives again here; they were outlined in my column in the May issue of *The Postal Record*. Instead, I want to focus on the five most important general observations we made.

First, we noted both the popularity and the importance of the Postal Service—among Americans and to the U.S. economy, respectively. Our 88 percent favorability rating in a February 2018 Pew Trust poll makes USPS the most popular agency in the federal government. We enjoy broad bipartisan support across the country because we play an essential role in the economy, without any taxpayer support. And we are the central hub of a hugely important mailing industry that accounts for \$1.4 trillion in sales and employs 7 million private-sector workers.

Second, we argued that maintaining the universal service obligation (to provide delivery everywhere at affordable prices) is as important for packages as it is for letters. Indeed, an

affordable public option (USPS) for parcel delivery protects Americans and businesses in rural areas (and distressed urban areas) from huge price increases for such delivery that would occur if USPS were privatized, deregulated or forced out of the parcel delivery market. It's also invaluable to companies and citizens in urban and suburban areas who would be at the mercy of a delivery duopoly (UPS and FedEx) without us.

Third, we educated the task force on all the hard work that has been done over the past 10 years to adapt to the changing postal needs of the country. We made it clear: USPS does not need to be restructured; it already has been dramatically restructured. It now employs 200,000 fewer career staff than in 2006 and has set productivity records. But for that to continue, we need to maintain a stable, career workforce, so we urged the task force to reject proposals that would attack the jobs, pay and benefits of postal employees.

Fourth, we emphasized that the main cause of the Postal Service's financial losses over the past decade has been the retiree health pre-funding mandate passed in 2006. We pointed out that the mandate accounts for 92 percent of USPS losses since 2007 and nearly 100 percent of the losses reported over the past five years. We urged the policymakers to focus their attention on repealing or addressing the pre-funding mandate by legislation or executive order.

Finally, we made it clear that USPS does not need a new business model, major service cuts or a redefinition of its universal service obligation. Now is not the time to revive misguided ideas that have already been rejected by Congress and the American people, such as ending Saturday and door delivery services. And it is certainly not the time for radical solutions, like privatization, deregulation or banning the Postal Service from package delivery. Rather, it's time to reform or repeal the pre-funding mandate. Period. Full stop. These actions, and an improved rate-setting system, are the keys to a thriving Postal Service in the 21st century. Since the Postal Regulatory Commission already is working on the rate-setting issue, we urged the Trump administration's task force to focus on pre-funding reform.

**NALC and our sister unions will use our white paper to educate** the public and the Congress about the right approach to preserving the Postal Service, and to defend ourselves from legislative attacks on our jobs and benefits. We also will work with our allies in the Grand Alliance to Save Our Public Postal Service to mobilize against any proposals emerging from the White House Task Force that threaten affordable universal delivery service of all kinds—letters, packages, newspapers, magazines and everything in between. I hope all of you will help us in this effort. It's our duty and our mission.