

# A new postmaster general: What's the agenda?



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**I**n all of American history, there have only been 74 postmasters general, starting with Benjamin Franklin in 1775. In early May, we learned that North Carolina businessman Louis DeJoy would be the 75th. DeJoy was selected by the Postal Service's Board of Governors, as provided by law. As has been the custom at NALC, we congratulated the new PMG on his appointment and offered our commitment to work in good faith to use our collective-bargaining relationship to strengthen the Postal Service. This month, PMG DeJoy will take office, and the biggest immediate question we face is: What is his agenda?

Of course, the most pressing priority must be overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic. Our goals as a union won't change one bit: We will continue to focus on protecting the health and safety of the country's city carriers and preserving their jobs by securing the survival of the Postal Service as a public enterprise. We expect, and will insist, that the new leadership work with us to secure these goals in the months ahead.

**DeJoy's longer-term agenda will be revealed through his actions** in the months and years ahead. Although I personally hope he will apply his experience in building and expanding his logistics business to building and expanding the Postal Service as a public service, his appointment coincides with more than a few red flags.

First, it comes at a time when the Trump administration has demonstrated open hostility toward the Postal Service. The president called the Postal Service "a joke" during an April press conference while spreading misinformation about the source of the financial crisis we face—falsely blaming low package prices instead of the historic pandemic-induced recession that has slashed mail volume and postal revenues—before walking it back in a subsequent Twitter post.

Earlier in March, Secretary of the Treasury Steve Mnuchin blocked a House of Representatives proposal to provide \$25 billion in financial relief to the USPS—a similar relief package to the one offered to airlines and hotels in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act—before agreeing to an inadequate \$10 billion conditional loan. This after the Treasury Department has threatened to withhold access

to credit unless the Board of Governors implements policy changes that would damage the Postal Service and its long-term viability.

In fact, during the very week DeJoy was appointed postmaster general, one member of the Board of Governors, David Williams, resigned in protest over the Treasury Department's inappropriate meddling in the management of the Postal Service. Along with my counterparts at the other three postal unions, I wrote to the Board of Governors to urge them to resist such meddling, noting that: "It is the role of a democratically elected Congress to set postal policy in this country, and it is the role of the Board and the [Postal Regulatory Commission] to implement that policy with the managerial and regulatory discretion provided by law. The Treasury Department has no authority to re-write the law or impose its policy preferences on the Postal Service—or the country."

The Treasury Department clearly wants to advance the disastrous recommendations of the 2018 White House Task Force on the Postal System—to cut service, eliminate collective bargaining and force the USPS out of the package-delivery business by dramatically raising prices. The question is: Does the new PMG support this agenda? The fact that he has donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to President Trump's re-election campaign has raised fears with some that he might.

**But none of us should automatically jump to such a conclusion.** Now is the time for calm and quiet determination to give the new postmaster general a chance. As I said upon his appointment, NALC is committed to working with the new PMG to build a shared vision that focuses on: a strategy to grow the USPS as a public institution; that values its employees; and that works with its unions to promote high-quality service, safety, efficiency and a workplace culture of mutual respect.

If Postmaster General DeJoy sets politics aside and works with us toward this shared vision, he will have a true partner in the NALC. If not, we will vigorously defend ourselves and the American people's right to high quality and affordable universal service. Either way, we will serve our members and the public interest with conviction.

Not since the first PMG took the job in 1775 has a new leader faced a more challenging environment in leading the American Post Office. Benjamin Franklin held the job as America's fight for independence in the Revolutionary War was just beginning; DeJoy is taking this position in the middle of a global pandemic. PMG Franklin passed the test. We hope that PMG DeJoy will do the same.