

History rhymes



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Entering 2021, I found it difficult not to think back to the crisis we faced in 2009. It all feels a little too familiar. A new president is elected and must respond to a global crisis that threatens the Postal Service. Then, it was the near collapse of the international financial system and the Great Recession. Now, it's a global pandemic.

As the saying goes, "History does not repeat itself, but it often rhymes." We are in a rhyming moment.

In one very important way, our current situation is better than the situation we faced in 2009. Thanks to the incredible performance of the Postal Service during the ongoing pandemic and

the 2020 elections, the level of attention on, and support for, the Postal Service has never been greater. Fixing the Postal Service is much higher on the nation's priority list in 2021 than it was in 2009. Today, on both sides of the U.S. Capitol, postal reform is getting immediate attention, and the White House already has issued a press statement on its intention to fill the three vacancies on the USPS Board of Governors.

Soon after this issue goes to press, the House Committee on Oversight and Reform will hold a hearing on the Postal Service and the incoming chairwoman, Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), has made it clear that legislation to bolster the Postal Service is her top priority. But that is just the beginning. Congress and the new president face a long to-do list on issues affecting letter carriers, which means that our union's to-do list is long as well. Let us review the key elements of that list.

Postal reform: Since 2007, 84 percent of the Postal Service's reported losses are directly related to the 2006 mandate to pre-fund future retiree health premiums decades in advance. The focus of any postal reform legislation must be to finally repeal this unfair mandate. A bill to do just that passed the House of Representatives with a huge bipartisan vote in February 2020. The same bipartisan bill (the USPS Fairness Act, H.R. 695 and S. 145) has been reintroduced in the House and Senate. Rep. Maloney intends to include it in a larger postal reform bill, along with a sensible plan to integrate postal employee health insurance coverage with Medicare on a prospective basis while providing the kind of safeguards NALC has advocated for years. Other measures on improving and expanding services in the USPS are also likely to be included. NALC intends to be front and center in this legislative effort.

USPS Board of Governors: Early action by the Biden administration to fill three vacancies on the USPS Board of Governors (all Democratic seats) and to renominate Ron Bloom, the new chairman of the board, also is urgent. For much of the past decade, the USPS did not have a functioning board. Filling the board with qualified governors who are committed to the essential public service mission of the Postal Service is vital for returning our employer to health.

Administrative actions: Although it might understandably take the new administration some time to fill some 4,000 senior positions that turn over when a new president takes office, we are urging the White House to act as soon as possible to use its executive authority to bolster the prospects of the USPS. Most notably, we hope that the Biden administration will finally implement the recommendations of the Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC) about the proper valuation of the Postal Service's Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) assets and obligations, a fairness measure that could save the USPS billions annually. We also will advocate for other executive measures to promote the use of the Postal Service within the federal government and to improve its usefulness for our country's small businesses and households.

Retirement fairness: On top of all this, we will once again pursue justice for our current and future retired members by lobbying for the Social Security Fairness Act (H.R. 82) to repeal the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and Government Pension Offset (GPO) provisions, as well as for the soon-to-be-announced Federal Retirement Fairness Act, which would allow postal employees to make contributions to the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) to gain retirement credit for their service to the government as non-career employees. And we hope to begin a conversation with leaders on both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue about the need to invest the Postal Service's \$320 billion in retirement fund assets more sensibly.

Including USPS in the Biden agenda: President Biden has an ambitious first-year agenda focused on ending the COVID-19 pandemic and "building our country back better" with smart investments in green technology and infrastructure. There are Postal Service needs and opportunities in both areas. Congress is now working on legislation to implement the Biden COVID-19 rescue plan, which includes renewing the virus-related leave provisions of last year's Families First Act; we are advocating for the funding of the Postal Service's share of these costs. We will push to add hazard pay for letter carriers and other essential workers. Later this year, when attention turns to infrastructure, we will work to secure a significant public investment in the Postal Service's vehicle fleet as the Biden administration seeks to implement the policies outlined in a recent executive order on the electrification of the federal vehicle fleet.

The recovery from the Great Recession was long and difficult, but we eventually bounced back from that crisis. In this moment of rhyming history, our aim is to bounce back faster and better.