

Why do we need postal reform?



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As you've read in this edition of *The Postal Record*, quality postal reform legislation that is fully supported by NALC is very close to becoming law. It may even have been signed into law by President Biden by the time you are reading this column. This month's "News from Washington" article has the latest details on the legislative process for H.R. 3076, as of press time for this magazine. President Rolando explained the provisions of the bill very well and their positive effect in his article this month.

I'm not going to use space here explaining the details of the bill.

Those are available in this magazine as explained above and on the NALC website at nalc.org. You have likely read about the provisions of H.R. 3076 that alleviate the Postal Service's burden to pre-fund future retiree health benefits. If you would like to learn more of the history of that pre-funding mandate, please see my column in the March 2020 *Postal Record*, which is also available online.

Let's start with the overall effect this reform will have on the Postal Service. The largest effect is simple—it will put the Postal Service in a much better and more sustainable financial condition, now and in the future. If you are a new letter carrier or just tuning in to the details of this legislation, some very understandable questions may be lingering in your mind—why do we need this reform? Why do we need to improve the Postal Service's financial condition? How does postal reform help letter carriers and others? Let's dig into the answers to these questions.

Letter carriers care deeply about the service we provide. We do not like it one bit when we are not able to provide high-quality service due to reasons that are out of our control. These reasons are usually staffing issues or poor decisions related to operational or personnel cost-cutting measures that affect service. Many of these decisions in the past have been made with poor judgment and a short-sighted approach. Others were deemed necessary by the decision-makers. In any case, and regardless of the merits of any decision, they were almost always driven by the

Postal Service's financial condition, which was mostly caused by the mandate to pre-fund future retiree health benefits.

The reform would improve the financial condition of our employer and allow high-level decisions to be influenced much more by improving service to our customers, improving efficiency and the potential for growing our business than by the doomsday scenarios of the manufactured pre-funding crisis that have influenced decision-makers in the past.

The Postal Service must be able to adapt and invest in necessary infrastructure improvements to put us in a position to not only improve the service we currently provide but to be in a position to grow the services we offer in the future. Improving and expanding services is a win-win for all. It is a positive for the customers who use it and rely on us. It is positive for the Postal Service to bring in revenue. It is a positive for letter carriers and other employees to maintain quality jobs.

Sometimes, the general topic of job security related to an employer's financial condition is simply described as something like "if your employer runs out of money, you have no job." It isn't quite that simple at USPS.

Since the pre-funding mandate became a financial burden during the economic recession in 2008-2009, there have been countless attempts by lawmakers and others to attack the Postal Service and its employees. Attempted attacks came from many that used the pre-funding mandate as an excuse for attempts to cut service to our customers, our collective-bargaining rights, benefits, retirement and more.

This legislation will largely remove that excuse and motivation for those who have initiated such attacks in the past. A financially stable and flourishing USPS that provides the quality middle-class jobs for NALC members is best for us, but also best for our customers.

This legislation is not a silver bullet. Those rarely, if ever, exist in the real world. Every problem that letter carriers and the Postal Service face will not instantly be fixed the moment the bill is signed into law by President Biden. However, a giant leap toward long-term financial stability will be taken the instant it is signed.

A large door of opportunity for improved service, jobs, infrastructure and business growth exists. That door has been barricaded to some degree by the onerous, unfair and unique mandate for USPS to spend tens of billions of dollars to pre-fund future retiree health benefits for well over a decade. This postal reform bill removes that barricade.