

Winning the legislative long game



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I had the privilege of attending a White House ceremony on April 6 to witness President Joe Biden sign the Postal Service Reform Act into law, transforming H.R. 3076 into Public Law 117-108. NALC member Annette Taylor, who recently retired after delivering mail for 33 years, was given the honor of introducing President Biden at the event. Her selection honored all letter carriers and was meant to recognize the essential role that postal employees play in American life—as well as the *long* years of grassroots activism by NALC and the other postal unions that made the legislation possible. I was so proud of Annette and equally proud of all of you.

How long? How about *seven Congresses, four postmaster generals and three U.S. presidents* long, over the course of a dozen-plus years. That's what it took to finally secure relief from the crushing retiree health pre-funding burden put in place in 2007, and to firmly protect the provision of six-day delivery in the governing statute of the U.S. Postal Service.

The immediate impact of the legislation's repeal of the pre-funding mandate, which accounted for more than 80 percent of USPS losses since 2007, will be to improve the Postal Service's bottom line by approximately \$4.5 billion annually, an important first step to restoring its financial stability. It took years of hard work by our staff, officers and activists to educate the public, the media and members of Congress of the need for relief from the pre-funding mandate. We eventually focused on simply repealing it via the USPS Fairness Act, which was unveiled during a lame-duck session of Congress in 2018. That bill is one of the main pillars of the reform signed into law last month.

The battle to protect six-day delivery was even more difficult and drawn out. On my very first day on the job as national president in July 2009, then-Postmaster General Jack Potter informed me that he would seek the elimination of Saturday delivery in response to the Great Recession. Starting in 2011, his successor, Patrick Donahoe, convinced the Obama administration to include this proposed service in its annual proposed budget. It would have been a catastrophic mistake, driving business out of the mail and exposing the Postal Service to demands to open mailboxes to private delivery companies on days when USPS did not deliver. Some 25,000 city carrier positions and 40,000 other full- and part-time postal jobs would have been lost. We fought back immediately to

block the change and then—year after year—to ensure that the six-day delivery mandate was renewed in the annual appropriations process. We were just getting started at the grassroots level:

- In August 2010, we put the issue on the national map with a huge rally with the AFL-CIO on the grounds of Los Angeles City Hall. Some 5,000 delegates to the NALC's 67th Biennial Convention in Anaheim, wearing "5-Day is the Wrong Way" T-shirts, joined with thousands of workers from dozens of other unions to demand action to create jobs to battle the recession. Since then, the entire labor movement has been a staunch ally on the issue.
- In early 2011, we worked with allies in Washington to introduce a "sense of Congress" resolution in support of six-day delivery, which quickly gained a bipartisan majority—thanks to the activism of our members and supporters. Incredibly, we would repeat that feat in each of the next five Congresses.
- In March 2013, we held "USA for Six Day" rallies in more than 100 cities across the country to mobilize public opposition to a plan by PMG Donahoe to unilaterally end Saturday delivery service in August 2013, regardless of the policy mandate passed by Congress. The reckless and arrogant PMG had announced his plan in February. By April, he backed down in the face of opposition in both Congress and among the American people, which we helped to mobilize. But Donahoe never gave up on his goal of eliminating six-day delivery as part of a misguided plan to relentlessly downsize USPS instead of developing a growth strategy.

The arrival of Postmaster General Megan Brennan in 2015 provided a needed reprieve from the battles over Saturday delivery. She pragmatically shelved efforts to secure delivery service cuts and instead focused on consensus reforms. Soon, however, the main threat to Saturday delivery and postal jobs was coming from President Donald Trump, who appointed a White House task force on USPS. The task force's final report called for massive service cuts and for allowing USPS to reduce the frequency and quality of delivery services. Although Congress rejected its recommendations, the report helped stymie bipartisan efforts to enact consensus postal reforms in 2020 and led PMG Brennan to suggest that the agency might, once again, pursue the elimination of Saturday delivery.

The last chapter in this long struggle was made possible by the election of a bipartisan pro-letter carrier majority in the House and Senate—and of President Biden, a staunch friend and supporter of the Postal Service and its employees. The arrival of a new PMG and Board of Governors that embraced Saturday delivery as part of a larger growth strategy also was crucial. Working with Democratic and Republican leaders in Congress, we finally made postal reform a reality.

We did not waver. We continued to fight. *Together, we won the legislative long game.*