News



hese days, it's almost a foregone conclusion that Congress will move at a glacial pace, if it budges at all. So it comes as no shock that there was no forward motion in March for the postal bills—good and bad—that currently are before the Senate and the House of Representatives.

That does not mean, however, that our mission to save the U.S. Postal Service has similarly stalled—not by a long shot.

For example, a lengthy, prominent and in-depth op-ed piece by Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) published by *The Wall Street Journal* on March 5 helped to move postal issues to the forefront in the minds of legislators and the public. Sanders is the sponsor of S. 316, a sensible postal reform bill designed to address in fair and responsible ways the Postal Service and its immediate and long-term health and viability.

"The Postal Service is under constant and vicious attack," Sanders wrote. "There are very powerful and wealthy special interests who want to privatize or dismember virtually every function that government now

During legislative lull, postal issues simmer

performs, whether it is Social Security, Medicare, public education or the Postal Service. They see an opportunity for Wall Street and corporate America to make billions in profits out of these services, and couldn't care less how privatization or a degradation of services affects ordinary Americans.

"For years, anti-government forces have been telling us that there is a financial crisis at the Postal Service and that it is going broke," he explained. "That is not true. The crisis is manufactured."

The senator went on to inform readers about the burdensome 2006 congressional mandate that USPS pre-fund over a 10-year period 75 years' worth of future retiree health benefits, a mandate that is shared by no other private enterprise or government agency and that is responsible for all of the Postal Service's financial losses since 2012.

"Without pre-funding, the Postal Service would have made a \$623 million profit last year," Sanders wrote.

The senator pointed out how bills before the House—Rep. Darrell Issa's (R-CA) H.R. 2748—and the Senate—S. 1486, sponsored by Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE) and Sen. Tom Coburn (R-OK)—would, if passed, steer the Postal Service into a death spiral brought on by needless reduction of door delivery and elimination of Saturday mail, further reducing revenue. The House and Senate bills have passed their respective committees but no full floor votes on either have been scheduled.

"There are much better ideas that would strengthen, not destroy the Postal Service," Sanders wrote—ideas contained in his S. 316 and its companion in the House, H.R. 630, introduced by Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-OR).

"First, pre-funding must end," he wrote. "The future retiree health fund now has some \$50 billion in it. That is enough. This step alone will restore the Postal Service to profitability."

Sanders also wrote that Congress should grant USPS the flexibility to provide new consumer products as well as limited financial services.

Six days later, the *Journal* ran several letters to the editor that responded to the Sanders piece, including a fact-based letter from NALC President Fredric Rolando that supported Sanders' argument and that outlined the Postal Service's financial picture.

"The Postal Service's financial picture is sharply improving," Rolando wrote. "Its fiscal year 2014 first-quarter report showed \$1.1 billion in black ink exclusive of the congressional mandate to pre-fund future retiree health benefits."

The positive trend, the president wrote, is fueled by two developments that augur well for the future: A gradually improving economy and an explosion in package-delivery revenue. "That makes the Internet a net positive," Rolando wrote.

"If lawmakers degrade a now-profitable network, they will hurt millions of ordinary Americans and businesses that benefit from the world's most affordable delivery service," the president wrote. "And they would hurt the Postal Service by driving mail and revenue away, thus stopping the postal turnaround in its tracks. Instead, legislators should fix the prefunding fiasco."

A new fact sheet that breaks down the serious flaws in the Carper-Coburn bill, and that offers real solutions to save the Postal Service, is posted on the Legislation and Politics page at nalc.org.

NOTICE

In the February COLCPE edition of The Postal Record, the amounts listed for "Automatic Contributors," in many instances, were doubled in error. We apologize for any confusion this may have caused.

Additionally, the following listings were incorrect:

Occasional Contributions:

Br. 451, Johnstown, PA **Barry Browne**

Br. 5480, Venice FL **Iennifer Tilka**

\$52

\$10

Automatic Contributions:

Br. 540 Camden, NJ Mgd. Kathleen Dahlman

\$780 Jeremy Edmonds Vernette Hunter Jr.

Déjà vu in Obama's 2015 budget

On March 5, President Barack Obama released his budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2015. And sadly, as it has for the past four years, it once again defers to the misguided wishes of Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe by calling for the end of Saturday mail delivery and for allowing the Postal Service to "begin shifting to centralized and curbside delivery where appropriate."

President Rolando quickly responded. "These budget proposals not only fail to address the main source of the Postal Service's problems," he said, "they also directly threaten nearly 100,000 good postal jobs at a time when the Postal Service's finances have rebounded strongly.

"The Obama administration remains under the spell of a misguided postmaster general, a leader who seems committed to sticking to an obsolete austerity plan devised in very different circumstances," Rolando said. "This is a weak, job-killing postal reform plan that Congress should soundly reject."

Republican leaders denounced President Obama's plan as "dead on arrival"-albeit for more ideological reasons. "Still, 'dead on arrival' seems about right to me," Rolando said. "NALC and other postal stakeholders must come together with our allies in Congress on a plan to help the Postal Service innovate and grow."

Postal unions form alliance

Declaring that "the U.S. Postal Service is under attack," the four postal unions-NALC, American Postal Workers Union, National Postal Mail Handlers Union and National Rural Letter Carriers' Association-announced on March 11 the formation of an alliance to fight back to preserve America's Postal Service for the benefit of the public.

"A congressionally manufactured financial crisis drains the USPS of vital resources," the union presidents wrote in a proclamation (found at nalc.org under "Latest News"). "Six-day delivery is under constant threat of elimination. The reduction of service standards and the elimination of half of the nation's mail processing centers have slowed service and wiped out tens of thousands of good jobs.

"We stand with the people of our country in defense of their right to a universal postal service operated in the public interest."

In its coverage of the March 11 announcement, the NALC website noted that the alliance's goal is to enlist public support in preserving the national treasure that is the U.S. Postal Service. "The USPS is based in the Constitution, provides Americans with the world's most affordable delivery network, and is operationally profitable without using a dime of taxpayer money," the announcement said.

Letter carriers in the news media

In a Feb. 19 op-ed piece in the *South* Florida Sun-Sentinel, President Rolando explained what's really behind a move to force residents of some new single-family home developments in Florida to use cluster boxes—and why it's not what was implied in a news story the newspaper ran about residents angered over not having door-todoor delivery. Two days after Rolando's piece ran, the Sun-Sentinel published an editorial condemning the Postal Service's moving customers to clusterbox mail delivery.

A Feb. 18 letter by Rolando to the editor of The Washington Post explained to readers that Congress needs to strengthen the Postal Service network and fix the pre-funding fiasco.

Region 15 National Business Agent Larry Cirelli was interviewed for a March 5 story about the Postal Service on New York City's WCBS-TV.

In the March issue of The American Legion Magazine, New York City Branch 36 member Juan Feliciano was featured in a story about letter carriers who are also military veterans. The Legion's 2.4 million members, who receive the magazine, also learned a great deal about the actual financial situation at USPS. The story included quotes from President Rolando, NALC Community and Membership Outreach Coordinator Pam Donato (herself an Army veteran), as well as other Branch 36 members.

Former Army SPC Santiago Erevia, now a retired letter carrier from San Antonio, was one of 24 veterans scheduled to receive the U.S. military's highest honor, the Medal of Honor, at a March 18 White House ceremony. A story about Erevia and the others was carried by the Associated Press and ran in many newspapers; separate articles were published in *The Washington Post* on its front page on Feb. 22, and on Feb. 25 in Erevia's hometown newspaper, San Antonio Express-News.

A letter by Fremont, NE Branch 89 letter carrier Brian Greunke to the editor of the Omaha World-Herald ran March 12. Nebraska's largest newspaper, it also circulates in parts of Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and South Dakota.

The Twin Falls [ID] Times-News ran a letter to the editor by Idaho State Association President John Paige on Feb. 21.

Bloomington, IL Branch 522 Vice President **Kim Herberger** and member **Gary Keist** were featured in a Feb. 20 story in *The Pantagraph*, a newspaper serving Bloomington and other Central Illinois communities. PR