

# House committee abandons one bad postal bill, approves another



**S**ince the beginning of May, Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA), chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee—the committee that has jurisdiction over the U.S. Postal Service—has drafted two separate, destructive postal bills in his ongoing attempts to end Saturday mail and door-to-door delivery.

The first bill, called the “Administration’s Postal Reform Act of 2014,” was scheduled for mark-up by Issa’s committee on May 7. Among other things, the measure called for an end to door delivery for millions of businesses, encouraged the “voluntary” elimination of door delivery to 35 million to 40 million American households, and sought to allow USPS to move to five-day mail delivery.

“If these so-called reforms ever became law, they would damage the unique postal network that allowed the Postal Service to turn an operational profit in Fiscal Year 2013 and so far in Fiscal Year 2014,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said. “And they would do nothing to resolve the 2006 mandate that the Postal Service pre-fund 75 years’ worth of future retiree health benefits and do so over 10 years.”

This unfair mandate, required of no other government agency or private company, accounts for most of the Postal Service’s reported financial losses since 2007 and all of its fiscal losses since October 2012.

Rolando also noted the use of the word “administration” in the bill’s title, Issa’s sly nod to President Barack Obama’s Fiscal Year 2015 budget proposal, submitted in March, which also calls for cuts in service.

“We’ve already let the White House know how disappointed we are with its proposals,” the NALC president said, “and officials within the administration have since indicated a willingness to discuss more sensible postal reform ideas.” (See the April *Postal Record*.)

But where Obama’s current proposal seems to show too much deference to the similarly misguided service cuts long called for by Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe, Issa brings to the table an agenda that is seemingly obsessed with attacking postal employees and postal customers instead of solving the problems USPS faces.

In the days before this bill’s scheduled mark-up, President Rolando urged thousands of NALC e-Activist Network members to call their House representatives and tell them to vote “no” on this destructive measure. The NALC president also joined with the presidents of the other three postal unions to send a letter to the Oversight Committee’s leaders, expressing our united opposition to the bill—a measure that shared many similarities with Issa’s earlier bill, H.R. 2748. (That bill was approved by the committee last July but has seen no action in the House since then, and none was scheduled when this magazine was being prepared.)

This intensive combined lobbying effort against the bill, boosted by a clear lack of congressional support for the bill from either Republicans or Democrats, paid off: Just hours before the May 7 mark-up meeting was set to take place, NALC received word that the meeting had been canceled and that consideration of the bill had been put on hold indefinitely.

“This failed attempt at postal reform was nothing more than a bad stunt aimed at driving a divide between Democrats, Republicans and the administration,” Rolando said. “Letter carriers, customers and the country deserve more.”

## Another battle begins

“But our fight isn’t over yet,” President Rolando wrote in a May 7 e-Activist message. “Stay tuned.”

# Unions rally to ‘Stop Staples’

In March, the four postal unions—NALC, the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), the National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU) and the National Rural Letter Carriers’ Association (NRLCA)—announced the formation of an alliance to fight for the preservation of USPS. And it wasn’t long before the members of this coalition had a chance to take to the streets and demonstrate their solidarity.

On April 24, off-the-clock representatives from each postal craft joined rallies across the country to protest a Postal Service proposal to replace full-service post offices with kiosks located in Staples stores, staffed by Staples workers instead of USPS employees.

“This proposal jeopardizes mail service and local post offices,” read a statement posted at StopStaples.com. “In fact, post offices across the country are at risk, along with the thousands of good jobs our communities depend on, which threaten to be replaced by low-wage jobs that hurt our economy.”

Organizers also said that the plan, if implemented, would be

Indeed, letter carriers didn’t have to stay tuned for long waiting for Issa’s next move. The California congressman quickly put on the agenda of his committee’s May 21 business meeting the mark-up of yet another postal bill, the so-called “Secure Delivery for America Act.” This time, Issa’s focus was on inconveniencing customers by forcing 15 million American households and businesses over the next 10 years to give up the door delivery to which they had become accustomed, in favor of remote cluster boxes or curb-line mailboxes—under the guise of increasing mail and package security.

“Again, Issa brought to the table a bill that not only is totally unacceptable to us and to our patrons,” Rolando said, “but that also makes no sense at all, given the Postal Service’s revelation in its May 9 financial report that it had made an operational profit of more than \$1 billion in the first half of Fiscal Year 2014.” (More about that report later in this article.)

Completely ignoring this bit of good news, Issa’s H.R. 4670 seeks to impose a \$1.1 billion mandate on American households and businesses—or on the Postal Service through vouchers—to dismantle their own mailboxes and to install curb-line or cluster boxes.

Rolando also noted, in a May 19 e-Activist alert, that Issa again was choosing to ignore the devastating impact the pre-funding law continues to have on USPS’ finances.

Unfortunately, the Oversight Committee approved H.R. 4670 at the conclusion of its May 21 meeting, along a predictably party-line vote.

“This irresponsible bill is bad for the American public, bad for businesses, bad for the economy and bad for the U.S. Postal Service,” President Rolando said in a statement following the vote. “And it simply ignores reality: Postal finances are steadily improving as the economy recovers from the worst recession in 80 years and as increasing online shopping sends package revenue soaring.

“We are confident that a majority of lawmakers will come to understand that degrading a now-profitable postal network not only makes no sense, it would stop the postal turnaround by driving mail—and revenue—out of the system,” the president said. “It would inconvenience millions of Americans and small businesses. And it would weaken the personal contact between residents and letter carriers.”

This bond, Rolando said, not only has led the public to name letter carriers the most trusted federal employees year after year, but it also has resulted in the saving of countless lives as letter carriers deliver the mail. And customer-carrier interaction has been crucial for the success of Customer Connect, the letter carrier-dependent sales lead-generation program that has brought in almost \$2 billion in new annual revenue for the Postal Service.



The ‘Stop Staples’ rally held in Washington, DC

bad for consumers, who would end up paying the same amount of money for less service.

“You have a right to post offices staffed by workers who are accountable to you, and to postal services provided by highly trained, uniformed Postal Service employees sworn to safeguard your mail,” the organizers said.

“The country and the Postal Service are finally recovering from the Great Recession, as booming e-commerce deliveries and rising direct-mail volumes offset reduced First Class Mail volumes,” the president said. “Dismantling the now-profitable postal network and diminishing service would stop this turnaround in its tracks.

“H.R. 4670 entirely misses the point,” he said. “Instead of wasting time breaking what’s working, lawmakers should fix what they broke. And as always, NALC is committed to working with both parties in Congress to discuss real reform that will strengthen the Postal Service to meet the needs of the 21st century.”

No House consideration for H.R. 4670 had been scheduled as this *Postal Record* was being prepared.

## Q2 financial report

On May 2, USPS released its financial statement for the second quarter of Fiscal Year 2014 (which covers January, February and March), reporting a quarterly operating profit of \$261 million.

“This brings the agency’s operating profit for the first half of fiscal 2014 to more than \$1 billion,” President Rolando said following the report’s release. “These results reconfirm the steady improvement in the finances of the Postal Service, which has been operating at a profit since October 2012.”

Rising online shopping has sparked a jump in package revenue, Rolando noted,

while a gradually rebounding economy has stabilized mail revenue. Also driving the quarterly performance were an 8 percent jump in package revenue and—in a turnaround—a 1.6 percent increase in letter revenue.

“This is why the Postal Service forecasts a \$1.1 billion operating profit this year,” he said. “So given these positive trends, it would be irresponsible for Congress or the postmaster general to degrade services to the public, which would drive away mail and revenue. Our profitable postal network is clearly up to the challenge of meeting the needs of an evolving 21st-century society—all without a dime of taxpayer money.”

## Majority House support for 6-day mail

On May 22, the day after the Oversight Committee approved Issa’s so-called “Secure Delivery for America Act,” letter carriers received a piece of much-needed good news from Capitol Hill: A majority of the House of Representatives’ 435 members, representing both parties, are now signed on to a resolution in support of six-day mail delivery service.

The measure, H.Res. 30, was introduced by Rep. Sam Graves (R-MO) in January 2013, just days after the beginning of the 113th Congress. Co-sponsor No. 218 was Rep. Tim Griffin (R-AR).

Although H.Res. 30 is a non-binding “sense of the House” resolution urging USPS to take all appropriate measures to ensure continuation of six-day mail, having a bipartisan majority of representatives state on the record that they support the measure helps bolster NALC’s lobbying efforts to preserve six-day delivery, Rolando said.

“While we’re happy to have a majority

of the House co-sponsoring H.Res. 30,” he said, “we urge all 435 House members to sign on to this sensible resolution.”

## ‘Sombrotto Post Office’ a step closer

Last summer, Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) introduced a bill calling for naming a New York City post office after former NALC President Vincent R. Sombrotto.

Sombrotto, a member of New York City Branch 36, was a key leader of the Great Postal Strike of 1970. He later served as NALC president from 1978 to 2002, and he died in January 2013. H.R. 2291 calls for applying the designation honoring Sombrotto to the station at 450 Lexington Ave. in Manhattan—just around the corner from Grand Central Station and within view of the iconic Chrysler Building.

Thanks in part to intense lobbying by letter carriers from the Empire State, on May 20 the measure received the needed number of sponsors from the state of New York’s House delegation. On May 23, the bill was approved by unanimous consent of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee—yes, Issa’s committee, which has jurisdiction over most things postal.

H.R. 2291 next will be sent to the full House for its expected approval, although no such vote had been scheduled by the time this *Postal Record* went to press. Post office-naming legislation is typically attached to other measures voted on by the House, and it is usually easily approved.

Following passage by the House, the bill would then be slated for Senate committee consideration, following the same trajectory for Senate passage before being signed into law by President Obama.

## Letter carriers in the news media

After the Postal Service released on May 9 its financial report for Fiscal

Year 2014’s second quarter (see above), many news stories about the report prominently quoted President Rolando, such as the *Washington Post*’s story that mentioned pre-funding as well as USPS’ \$261 million profit in the second quarter. The piece engendered lots of comments on *The Post*’s website.

Joe Davidson’s *Washington Post* federal column the following Monday looked at the discrepancy between how USPS and NALC viewed the second-quarter results, and it had an interesting take on the operating profit issue. Essentially a debate between Rolando and USPS Chief Financial Officer Joseph Corbett, Davidson’s article hinted at a bit of inconsistency on USPS’ part over the reported red ink.

*The New York Times*’ story repeated much of Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe’s usual negative “spin” on the financial numbers, but *The Times* did point out operating revenue of \$16.7 billion, a \$379 million increase over the same period the previous year and the third straight quarter in which USPS posted a revenue increase. Rolando was the only person quoted in the story besides Donahoe.

The headline in the *Federal Times*’ story was one of the rare ones to state that USPS’ finances are improving. The Associated Press story was helped by some useful perspective provided by the reporter; it ended with a quote from President Rolando, the only person quoted other than Corbett and Donahoe. *The Hill*’s coverage included a quote from Rolando as well.

*Government Executive* had a good story that quoted President Rolando, while *The Wall Street Journal*’s short article about the report hewed mainly to USPS’ narrative.

Outside of the coverage of the quarterly report, the NALC and President

Rolando found prominent mention in a number of news media outlets. For example, *National Review Online* ran Rolando's letter to the editor on May 13. It sparked almost 200 comments, many supportive, on the conservative publication's website. The president also was quoted on May 8 in a story in *The Hill* about Issa's withdrawal of the "Administration's Postal Reform Act" (see above).

The May 5 *Federal Times* carried an article on the big picture of USPS' improving finances. The online story's headline and first paragraph mentioned improving finances, and it ended with four paragraphs featuring quotes from President Rolando that put the whole story in perspective.

The president had a letter in *The Washington Post* on Saturday, April 26. In it, he addressed an April 21 *Post* article about Issa's postal legislation attempts, and Rolando reminded readers—including lawmakers and their staffs—that USPS is profitable when taking pre-funding into account.

Rolando was given an opportunity to offer some facts and perspective about USPS in a guest column for *The Augusta [GA] Chronicle's* Sunday, April 20 edition. *The Chronicle* had published an April 5 editorial about USPS that accurately noted how the agency isn't budgeted a dime of taxpayer money, but it repeated some possibly misleading conventional wisdom about the agency.

An April 16 story on The Huffington Post, about a USPS proposal to allow Staples employees to handle some postal services (see sidebar, page 7), used a quote from Rolando in support of a high-quality USPS that employs trained, uniformed and accountable men and women.

The union's rank-and-file letter carriers also continued to use the news media to spread our message and dispel myths. And occasionally, their own actions made the news.

Carmel, IN Branch 888 letter carrier **Ronnie Roush** had a letter to the editor published in the May 14 *Indianapolis Star*. On May 8, Logan, UT Branch 970 President **Aaron Porter** spoke to radio station KVNU about a variety of letter carrier issues. And Lansing, MI Branch 122 President **Matt Tanner** had a letter to the editor published by *The Argus-Press* on May 1.

Idaho State Association President **John Paige's** letter to the editor of the *Twin Falls Times News* ran April 13; on April 22, *The Idaho Statesman* also ran a letter from Paige.

**Ron Berry**, a retired member of Marshfield, WI Branch 978 and a former local business agent, wrote a column for the April 9 *Marshfield News Herald* in support of the Postal Service.

The actions of three letter carrier heroes also received news media coverage. The May 2 *Hunterdon County [NJ] Democrat* had a story about South Jersey Branch 908 letter carrier **Joy Melita**; On April 30, the *New York Daily News* wrote about the heroic actions of **Joey Urbina** of Long Island City Branch 357; and Denver NBC affiliate KUSA-TV and ABC affiliate KMGH-TV on April 28 covered the presentation of a "Postal Hero Award" to Centennial Colorado Branch 5996 letter carrier **Danny Chavis**. Read more about these letter carriers, and many others, in the "Proud to Serve" article that starts on Page 30.

You can find links to these and many more such stories in the "Postal Facts" section of [nalc.org](http://nalc.org). **PR**

## New York delegation visit

From April 29 through May 1, letter carrier activists from the state of New York came to Washington, DC, for their annual lobbying trip. On April 30, they gathered at NALC Headquarters for a rap session conducted by President Fredric Rolando, followed by a reception attended by several members of Congress.



Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-1)



Rep. Paul Tonko (D-20)



Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney (D-18)



Rep. Dan Maffei (D-24)



Rep. Charles Rangel (D-13)



Rep. Tim Bishop (D-1)