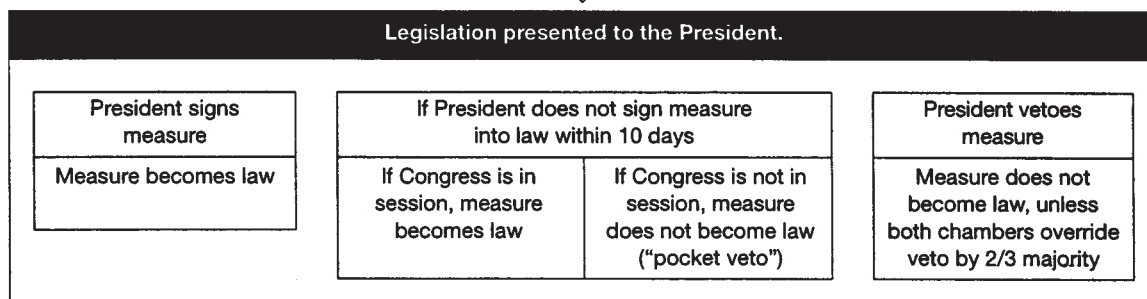
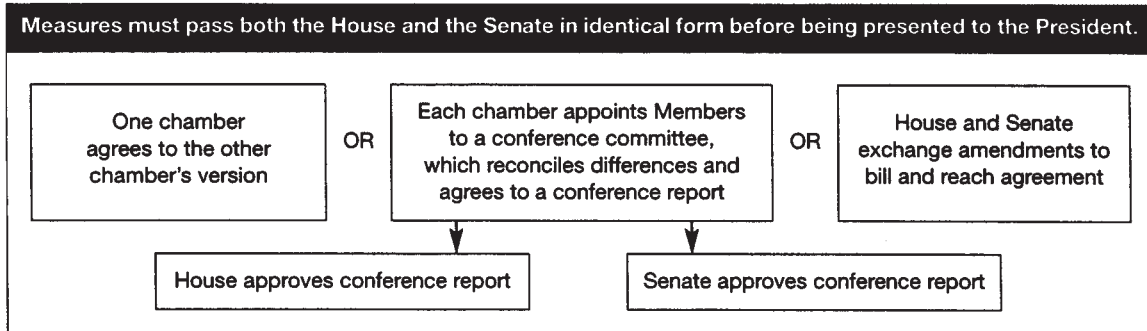
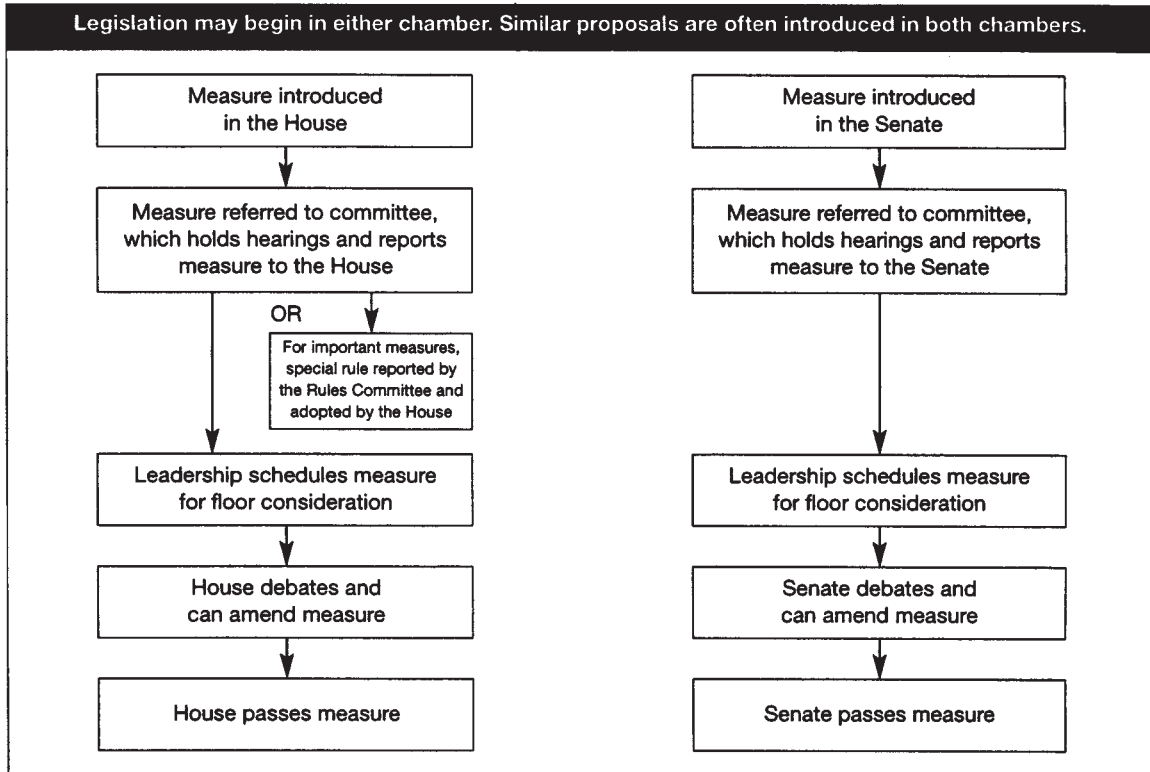




Letter carrier
guide to
**Legislative
Action**



■ HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW



■ GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM

At first glance, it may seem that Congress has a minimal impact on your day-to-day life, but your job, your rights as a union member, and your health and retirement benefits are subject to congressional action. Every two years the entire House of Representatives and one-third of the Senate is up for election. But it is not enough to pay attention to what is happening only when election time rolls around. Continued involvement in the legislative process is essential to all letter carriers.

Washington, DC is a city full of lobbyists. These are people who advocate before Congress and the federal government on behalf of business interests, non-profit organizations, and even labor unions. Some of these interests, including anti-postal forces, have enormous resources at their disposal. At the NALC, a professional staff regularly lobbies on Capitol Hill, but their success is limited without an active membership. Grassroots activism remains our most effective tool in influencing congressional action. Since elected officials face election on a regular basis, they are always mindful of their constituencies.

You realize the importance of comprehensive benefits and union rights for all letter carriers. In addition, you know firsthand the challenges facing the USPS. By effectively communicating your experiences as a letter carrier to members of Congress, you bring an unmatched level of credibility when it comes to postal issues.

Grassroots activism is a three-legged table; the table tips without three equally strong legs and crashes when one of the legs is removed.

- **Relationships** – A foundation based on lasting relationships with Members of Congress, forged through constituent visits in the district office and when visiting Washington, DC, is the first leg of the table. Without established dialog between local letter carriers and their elected officials, progress is hindered.
- **An Action Network** – The second leg of the table is preparation for rapid action. Letter writing, phone banks and lobbying visits to members of Congress are the most tangible components of this leg, but are ineffective without prior planning.
- **Mobilization** – The last, but equally important leg of the table is mobilization—carriers united behind one message convinces Congress of our dedication to our goals through action. If the table is strong, the NALC is impossible to beat.

■ RELATIONSHIPS: LAYING THE FOUNDATION

Relationships with members of Congress, regardless of their ideology or seniority, are pivotal to grassroots accomplishments. Over time, this relationship can grow from one of understanding to active support of letter carrier issues. With a little effort, you can meet with your elected officials and their staffs to discuss issues that matter most to letter carriers. Town hall meetings, parades and picnics are just some of the opportunities available to constituents to get to know their elected representatives to lay a foundation. That way, when the moment for immediate action arrives, the NALC will be ready to ask members of Congress to advocate for letter carriers.

■ ESTABLISHING AN ACTION NETWORK

Although it may be difficult to anticipate Congress' schedule, a call to action is something for which you must always be prepared. By communicating with elected officials, we determine where they stand on particular issues. Sharing information among ourselves helps us to focus, or "target," members of Congress who have not made up their minds. Therefore, most of our attention is directed at a fraction of Congress. Because grassroots action is often needed at a moment's notice and usually requires great urgency, a communications network must be readied in advance in all Congressional districts.

■ MOBILIZING THE MEMBERS

When the moment arrives for action, follow-through is essential. The NALC's position is most persuasive when carriers have a common message. There are many methods of delivering this message; phone calls, letters and visits remain the most effective. Approaches differ depending on the time frame and message, but unity and broad-based participation are the hallmarks of an effective campaign and strengthen our position on Capitol Hill. The most persuasive message means nothing without a mobilized membership.

What is an RFC?

Regional Field Coordinators link letter carriers to Washington, DC. You likely remember RFCs from state conventions and trainings, but their role in the NALC's legislative mobilization does not end after a convention ends. RFCs are your best resource in Washington, especially if you have questions about legislation on Capitol Hill. Each RFC coordinates with the National Business Agents and the state chairs in that region, to inform and mobilize members, from large group trainings to grassroots legislative campaigns.

■ CONGRESS IN ACTION

Many grassroots campaigns aim to persuade a member of Congress to vote in their favor on the floor; however, there are many other opportunities to affect the outcome of legislation. As illustrated by the flow-chart on the inside front cover of this booklet, the path between the introduction of a bill and its enactment into law is filled with technicalities. Further complicating the process, the House and Senate vary in procedure.

Committees are the backbone of Congress. In fact, our system of lawmaking is often referred to as “government by committee,” as most important decisions are made at this level. After a bill is introduced on the floor and assigned a bill

number, it is referred to the appropriate committee. Each committee has jurisdiction over defined areas, and most committees have subcommittees handling a narrower jurisdiction. The committee or subcommittee chairman, always a member of the majority party, can schedule hearings.

The path between the introduction of a bill and its enactment into law is filled with technicalities.

Hearings, often spurred by hot topics and newsworthy events, are opportunities for committee members and staff to gather information from experts and interested parties. For example, both the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee and the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee held numerous postal reform hearings where USPS officials, industry executives, and union leaders, including President Emeritus Young, delivered testimony. Hearings help Congress gauge the importance of issues, and are, in essence, the “fact-finding” stage before legislation is acted upon.

Members of Congress, regardless of committee assignment, are able to sign up as co-sponsors



Rep. Tom Davis of Virginia is escorted to the stage to address the NALC National Convention in Las Vegas.

of legislation. Co-sponsors submit their names to the sponsor's office, and the sponsor, or author of the legislation, submits these names to the public record. Though co-sponsorship is not binding, it indicates support for a piece of legislation. The NALC has successfully used grassroots co-sponsorship recruitment to demonstrate support in legislative battles over the years.

Committee action and co-sponsorship recruitment occur before legislation moves to the floor. Floor action presents another opportunity for the NALC to affect legislation. Members of Congress can offer amendments to legislation during floor debate in most cases. Some amendments have minimal impact on legislation, while others dramatically alter original language. Amendments offer a bill's opponents a last chance to alter or derail legislation.

Committee proceedings, co-sponsorship recruitment and floor action are pivotal to the NALC's fight to affect change. But to have an impact on Capitol Hill, the NALC must communicate its message by building a firm foundation, preparing for the next challenge, and remaining dedicated to the union's goals.

BECOME AN NALC LEGISLATIVE ACTIVIST

One of the easiest and most effective ways to get involved in NALC's legislative effort is to sign up as a legislative activist. The union has made great use of this grassroots effort by communicating directly to members who have acted to contact and influence their representatives in Congress. Without this effort, postal reform legislation would never have become a reality. But this is just a start for NALC. Sign up now to help us fight contracting out and keep the Postal Service viable in the future. Visit <http://www.unionvoice.org/nalc/join.tcl> to sign up.



NALC President Emeritus William H. Young (c.) and Region 11 National Business Agent William Cooke speak with New York Sen. Hillary Clinton at an NALC reception.



Sen. Susan Collins of Maine, greets President Emeritus Young before a hearing.

L A Y I N G T H E G R O U N D W O R K F O R S U C C E S S

“Hurry up and wait” accurately describes Capitol Hill’s pace. There are week-long periods when Congress does not meet; at other times, Congress is in session until the small hours of the morning.

When the NALC issues a call to action, the time to recruit committed activists and build relationships with elected officials and their staffs has passed. When President Emeritus Young, your National Business Agent or state chair contacts you for action, there is often little time to act.

■ F A C E - T O - F A C E M E E T I N G S

Interacting with your member of Congress on a personal level is extremely important to establishing the lasting relationships that aids the NALC’s lobbying efforts. Encounters with members can take place at a variety of events including public forums, picnics, rallies, press conferences—even at the local grocery store! All of these situations present great opportunities for letter carrier activists to interact with members of Congress and create a foundation that can then lead to effective office visits.

Effective communication with members takes different forms, depending on the situation. Public functions such as fairs and rallies offer the member the opportunity to greet a large number of constituents, but may not be conducive to in-depth conversations. On the other hand, town hall meetings are a great venue for citizens to expand on their concerns and also have the member respond. The conditions of the situation will dictate how to handle the meeting.

If you encounter a member of Congress at a public event like a rally, **it is most important that you identify yourself as a constituent and a letter carrier.** The member is often under strict time constraints so this is not the time to start a serious conversation about an issue. You may

MEET YOUR REPRESENTATIVE

Some opportunities for letter carrier activists to get to know their elected officials include the following:

- Fairs, picnics and parades
- Town hall meetings
- Labor Day rallies
- NALC functions
- “Letter carrier for a day”

mention to the member that you would like to set up a meeting at a more convenient time to discuss an issue. Always follow up appointments with the member’s office! Do not assume that you have a meeting just because the member agreed to one. The steps of setting up an appointment are detailed later in this booklet.

Meeting the member in a more intimate forum, such as at a town hall meeting or NALC branch meeting, presents a great opportunity to have a substantive discussion about an issue. As always, it is important to state that you are a constituent and a letter carrier. After entering into discussions with the member about a certain issue, you may also want to suggest a meeting with the member and their staff to continue the conversation and further this relationship. Some ways to follow up include inviting the member to be a letter carrier for a day, to tour your station, or to walk your delivery route. These could give the member hands-on knowledge about the nuts and bolts of the Postal Service and give you the opportunity to deeply engage the member in conversation.



NALC activists greet former President Bill Clinton on the campaign trail for Congressional candidates.

■ TOOLS FOR S U C C E S S

There are three principal ways of influencing the legislative process: office visits, written correspondence (e-mail, faxes, letters) and phone calls. Office visits allow you to reinforce relationships with members of Congress, communicate the NALC's message on key issues and receive immediate feedback about legislative initiatives. With ample preparation time, a letter-writing campaign is ideal. With shorter notice of floor or committee action, a phone tree or phone bank is most practical. Additionally, technological advances have affected grassroots mobilization; information is exchanged at a pace more rapid than just a few years ago. We must incorporate all media into our efforts. Each approach has advantages and disadvantages, but what is most important is to be prepared and use the right method for the given scenario.

■ OFFICE V I S I T S

An office visit is an ideal opportunity to introduce a member of Congress to substantive issues that are most important to the NALC. In face-to-face meetings, you have the opportunity to get to know your representatives and to have a "give-and-take" discussion about the issues affecting you as a letter carrier and the public you serve.

Successful meetings with members of Congress require planning. Whether you meet in a district or Washington, DC office, or even at your union hall, you need to make an appointment with the representative or senator's scheduler. Requests for a meeting should always be in writing. Your request should include your contact information (don't forget to mention that you are a letter carrier), the issues you wish to discuss, and how many people will be attending the meeting. Office



Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi talks with President Emeritus Young at an AFL-CIO phone bank.

addresses can be found in the NALC Congressional Directory or in the Blue Pages of your local phone book. Always follow up with the scheduler and confirm the appointment a few days in advance.

After you identify who will be attending the meeting, the union delegation should schedule a pre-meeting to develop strategy. Some of the things you should discuss include: Will there be one speaker or many, and who will be the note-taker? Is there a particular letter carrier with experience on a specific issue that warrants sharing? A goal, whether it is co-sponsorship of a bill or thanking a member of Congress for past support, will help make your meeting a success. As the relationship with your member of Congress grows, you can ask him or her for greater support: to be a vocal advocate rather than just a co-sponsor, or to author legislation rather than ask questions at hearings. Setting goals in advance focuses meetings, making them more likely to yield results for letter carriers on Capitol Hill.

When the day of the meeting actually comes, there are a few things you want to remember:

- Ask for your representative's stance on key issues.
- Make sure the note-taker writes down all positions and non-positions.
- Listening is as important as what you say.
- It is important to stay focused.

KNOW THE BASICS

Before contacting a member of Congress, know the following basic information:

- Are you contacting a senator or a representative?
- Is the member a man or a woman?
- Do you know the proper spelling/pronunciation of the member's name.
- What committees does the member sit on?
- Remember, senators represent states; House members represent districts.
- *Always be courteous.*



Letter carriers from New York took advantage of an opportunity to meet Sen. Charles Schumer (second from l.) at Yankee Stadium to discuss NALC issues.

- Do not let the person you're meeting with change the conversation topic.
- Do not be surprised or upset if your representative disagrees with you on any of the issues.
- Becoming angry or making threats is ineffective and can jeopardize the opportunity for cooperation in the future.
- Before you leave, give your member of Congress issue papers as a reference, and reiterate your position with a reminder that you look forward to working together in the future.

Sometimes, especially if you are meeting in Washington, DC, you will meet with a staffer rather than the member of Congress. You should not be disappointed or upset by this. In fact, the opportunity to speak to staff can often

be as important as speaking to the member directly. Staff members, regardless of their titles, cover many specific subject areas, including postal issues, retirement and labor. They have the member of Congress's ear when it is time to make a decision on a particular piece of legislation. Because staffers focus on a handful of issues, you may find that they are better versed than their bosses, who must cover everything!

After the meeting, follow up with the staff, whether that entails providing more detailed information on a topic or simply a "thank you" for their time. Reporting on your meeting at the next branch meeting is important as well. Finally, be sure to forward a copy of the NALC Lobbying Report to the legislative department and file a copy for your own future reference.



Maryland Sen. Ben Cardin.

Many state associations sponsor lobbying visits to Washington. Prior to visiting Capitol Hill, congressional district liaisons, activists, and state officers attend briefing sessions, receiving the most up-to-date information from the NALC National Office staff. These visits provide an opportunity for union activists to lobby members of Congress in solidarity and let their voices be heard.

IS ANY LETTER BETTER THAN NO LETTER?

■ WRITTEN CORRESPONDENCE

Letter writing (as well as faxing and e-mailing) is an effective form of lobbying because it shows that you, the voter, are spending the time and effort to express your viewpoint. One thoughtful letter from a constituent may have an influence on a legislator. A number of letters on a particular subject can have a larger impact—legislators must take note when large numbers of constituents speak their minds.

You can write letters to your legislator for several purposes: to express your opinion on an issue and urge the member to support your views with co-sponsorship and votes, to congratulate and thank a member for a particular vote, or to express polite disapproval. Letter writing is a terrific activity for branch, auxiliary or retiree meetings.

Writing a letter to your congressman or senator is a simple task. Your letters merely need to be clear, accurate and brief. To help you write an effective letter, some basic guidelines are given here. You can also consult the sample letter outline. Read these guidelines carefully—your letter will be more effective if written properly.



Michigan Sen. Debbie Stabenow (c.) was an honored guest at an NALC event.

When it comes to writing Congress you should follow this rule: the amount of effort you put into your letter is the amount of attention you should expect it to receive. Compare the effort it takes to sign a petition or a pre-printed form letter as opposed to an individual, personalized letter. Which one do you think is more effective?

- ✓ Keep your letters brief and to the point.
- ✓ Write on your union or personal letterhead, if possible, and sign your name above your typed signature at the end of each message.
- ✓ Identify your subject clearly. State the name and number of the legislation about which you are writing. House bills generally begin with the letters “H.R.” and Senate bills with an “S” followed by a number. If a bill has a name as well, the name of the bill should be provided along with the bill number.
- ✓ State your reason for writing. Ask your senator or representative for their support of the NALC’s position. Your own personal experience can help to support that position. Explain how the issue affects you, your family, or fellow letter carriers.
- ✓ Ask your legislators to state their positions on the issue by replying to you. Follow up if you have not heard from them in a reasonable period of time, but do not harass. Members of Congress receive a high volume of letters, e-mails, faxes, and phone calls, and it is not unusual for it to take 4-6 weeks to receive a reply.
- ✓ Provide a copy of your letter and the response you receive to the NALC Legislative Department.

SAMPLE LETTER TO CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE

Your name
Your address

Today's date

The Honorable (insert name of Representative or Senator)
U.S. House of Representatives (or United States Senate)
Washington, DC 20515 (or 20510 for Senators)

Dear Representative (or Senator) _____:

Paragraph 1:

- Identify yourself as a constituent and a member of NALC Branch ____ .
- Identify the bill number you are concerned with and where it is in the process (in subcommittee, full committee, or up for a vote in the full House or Senate).
- State your position on the bill. Indicate whether you are asking your Representative or Senator to support or oppose the bill.

Paragraph 2:

- Ask what position the Representative or Senator has on this issue.
- Explain why the bill is important to you.
- Tell a personal story to illustrate the effect the bill's passage or failure would have on your life.
- If applicable, explain what service that the USPS presently provides would be in jeopardy (for example, universal service at uniform rates) if the bill passes or fails.

Paragraph 3:

- Restate your position and the actions you want the Representative or Senator to take.
- Thank the representative for his or her attention to this issue and ask for a response stating his or her position on this bill.

Sincerely,

Your signature

Your name

NALC Branch _____

■ P H O N E C A L L S

When time is of the essence, phone calls are the most effective method for spreading your message. A call to action from the NALC requires a swift response, so preparedness is key. Prepare a phone list with names and phone numbers of activists in advance along with a system for contacting them on short notice. Circulate a phone script to all activists along with any additional instructions (a sample phone script can be found below).

Elected representatives want to know where their constituents stand on a particular issue and numerous phone calls from different individuals can make a difference. It is often difficult to know in advance who the target will be on a particular issue. That is why it is imperative that there is a system for activating NALC members quickly in each congressional district.

Phone calls to a member of Congress are effective even if you speak with staffers instead. Members of Congress are rarely available to have a phone con-

versation. Their staff is there to be the eyes and ears for the member. Request to speak to the staffer handling your issue, such as retirement or the Postal Service. When you register your views with staffers, they pass along these sentiments to their boss, especially when they receive many calls on the same issue.

Your phone calls to members of Congress and their offices should always be planned in advance, following the same basic guidelines for writing a letter. Before you call, make sure you have a clear idea of your position and the action you want the member of Congress to take on the matter. Always ask for the member's position on the issue in question. If you find out how the member intends to vote, immediately contact the NALC Legislative Department (or a CDL, state chair or NBA whom you know is in touch with the Legislative Department). Information nurtures strong grassroots campaigns, linking letter carriers in the field to Washington, DC.

SAMPLE CALL TO CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE

Receptionist, Congressman _____'s Office: "Good morning, Congressman _____'s Office."

Caller: "Good morning. My name is _____, and I'm a letter carrier living in _____. Is there someone there I can talk to about _____ (state the issue—for example, postal reform)?"

Receptionist: "Yes, let me put you through." (If the receptionist does not provide you with the name, make sure you ask for the first and last name of the person to whom you speak).

Staffer: "May I help you?"

Caller: "My name is _____. I'm a member of the National Association of Letter Carriers Branch _____ in _____ and I would like to encourage the congressman to vote in favor of HR _____ (and state the name of the bill if there is one). The bill is going to the House floor this week. Do you know the congressman's position?"

Staffer: "Yes, he is in favor of the legislation. I'll let the Congressman know of your concerns on this matter. Could I get your name and address so the Congressman can respond to you?"

Caller: Provide your name and address.

RECRUITING ACTIVISTS

In addition to laying the groundwork to establish relationships with members of Congress, it is also imperative to secure a union activist infrastructure as well.

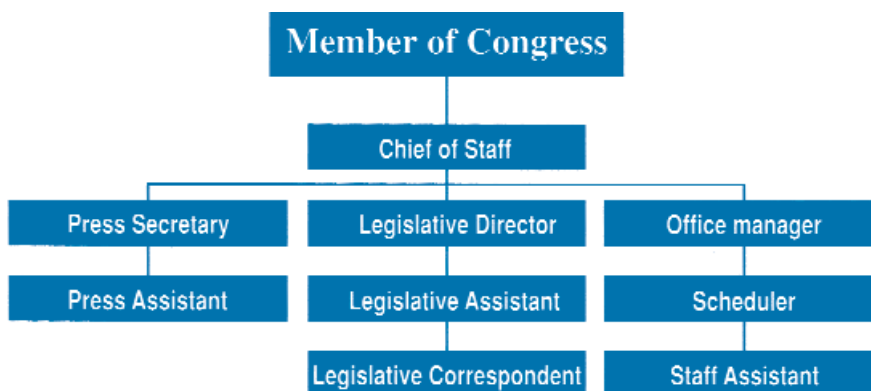
The NALC has created the Legislative Activist sign-up form found on page 2 and available from your NBA or state chair. Those wishing to become activists can also sign up at www.NALC.org. Becoming an activist is easy; all it requires is a commitment to learn about the issues and to contact your representatives when called upon to do so.

■ S U M M A R Y

One contact does not change Congress, but building a foundation through a continuous, broad-based, long-term effort by all letter carrier activists does make a difference. Preparation readies each activist for any challenge ahead, and dedication ensures the NALC will meet its goals. Every endeavor, whether a handshake at a county fair, a meeting in Washington, DC, a written request for co-sponsorship, or a last-minute phone entreaty to vote in support of letter carriers on the floor, solidifies the NALC's

clout in Washington. Political action is particularly important for letter carriers; electing congressmen and senators who identify with the NALC's priorities from the outset is crucial, and does not occur in a vacuum without grassroots legislative action. Voter registration and mobilization are counterparts to office visits and letter-writing campaigns. Participatory democracy requires activists. When letter carriers seize opportunities, their voices are heard both through the ballot box and in Congress.

CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE STRUCTURE



This booklet is one in a series designed to teach NALC members how to become more active in both the political and legislative processes. Other publications address Hatch Act and election guidelines and letter carriers in political campaigns. The goal is to create a program that brings more letter carriers into the activist process, and increases the union's visibility with federally elected candidates. For copies of these other publications and fact sheets on issues and congressional bills important to letter carriers, check the NALC website (www.nalc.org) or contact your Regional Field Coordinator.