

It's time for Congress to step up to the plate



William H. Young

I have testified before Congress many times over the past dozen years. It is always an honor to represent this great union and its members, and it is always a little thrilling for a small-town boy like me to play a role in our nation's democracy. But the hearing held on March 25 by the House Subcommittee on the Federal Workforce, Postal Service and the District of Columbia was special. It may have been the most important hearing I've ever attended.

In the teeth of the current economic crisis, the future of the Postal Service hangs in the balance. The subcommittee chairman, Rep. Stephen Lynch (D-MA), called on the Postal Service, its regulators, the postal unions and the postal management associations to testify about how to restore the financial stability of the USPS.

The testimony I submitted on behalf of our union is available on our website—I hope every member will read it. My message to Congress was simple: You can count on letter carriers in a crisis. We always deliver, as we did after 9/11, after the anthrax attacks, after Hurricane Katrina, after the economic meltdown—and now Congress must return the favor. The NALC and the Postal Service cannot overcome this crisis alone. We stepped up to the plate to creatively adjust routes in response to plunging mail volumes, but legislative action is urgently needed to stabilize the Postal Service's finances.

As a first step, that means passing H.R. 22, a bill to reduce (though not eliminate) the burden of pre-funding future retiree health benefits. But beyond that, it means revisiting a number of key financing issues, including the eligibility of the Postal Service for Medicare Part D subsidies that other employers receive for providing drug coverage to retired workers, and making the Treasury, not the USPS, pay for military pension benefits earned by postal employees under the FERS retirement system.

I used my testimony to convey how angry we all are about the state of our economy, but at the same time I urged Congress to

reject panic-driven proposals by postal management to eliminate six-day delivery. In my oral testimony, I said:

I hope the innocent victims of the greed, the corruption and the incompetence on Wall Street don't get lost in the midst of all this anger. And believe me, my members are plenty angry—the financial elite of this country, aided and abetted by foolish deregulation, have trashed our economy, and the historic recession we face threatens the jobs and well-being of 700,000 postal families across this country.

Nothing we did, nothing the Postal Service did and nothing the postal industry did caused this crisis.... We come to you now because the Postal Service is in trouble and we need your help. The decisions this Congress makes will determine what level of service will be provided to the nation's citizens in the new century. And before it even considers drastic—and probably counterproductive—measures such as a move to five-day delivery or redefining universal service, it should review the full range of policies that affect the cost of USPS post-retirement obligations....

The good news is that we got the attention of both Congress and the Obama administration. Within a week of the hearing, I was invited to the White House to discuss the crisis with the president's deputy chief of staff and top officials of the Office of Management and Budget. And thanks to all the hard work of our e-Activists and the hundreds of carrier-lobbyists who have visited Washington already this year, the number of co-sponsors of H.R. 22 reached nearly 260 as this issue of *The Postal Record* went to press. We are getting very close to our goal of enacting serious emergency relief for the Postal Service, without requiring a single penny of taxpayer money.

It won't be easy to overcome the worst recession since the 1930s, but with allies like Chairman Lynch in Congress and a true friend in the White House, we have a fighting chance. As long as we stick together as a union, I know we will not fail. ☐