

# Allies united to rebuild America's middle class



**W**hen President Obama spoke at the AFL-CIO convention last month, he made a very compelling case for rebuilding the middle class by strengthening our labor movement. I was honored to share the stage with him in Pittsburgh and was extremely pleased when he said:

We'll grow our middle class by building a stronger labor movement.... (W)hether we're in good economic times or bad economic times, labor is not the problem—labor is part of the solution.... That's why we've begun reversing and replacing old anti-labor executive orders (and) policies with ones that protect your benefits, and protect your safety, and protect your rights to organize and collectively bargain. That's why the very first bill I signed into law was the Lilly Ledbetter Act to uphold the basic principle of equal pay for equal work. And that's why I stand behind the Employee Free Choice Act, because if a majority of workers want a union, they should get a union.

**The president noted that even before** the financial crisis struck a year ago, incomes for most Americans had been stagnating for more than a decade, in part because our economy was twisted, both on Wall Street and in Washington, to benefit the wealthy elite, and in part because out-of-control health care costs were squeezing our wages.

I was especially pleased with his message on health care, because fixing what ails our broken health care system is directly related to the battle we are fighting in Congress over the exorbitant cost of pre-funding future retiree health benefits. As long as health care costs are skyrocketing, the long-term costs of these benefits will soar and the financial viability of the Postal Service will be threatened. As long as there are tens of millions of uninsured Americans, those of us with insurance will pay 20-30 percent higher premiums to cover the cost of medical care provided to the unin-

sured. Excessive health care costs are sinking the USPS and damaging the finances of our members.

We all know the health of the economy and the standard of living of middle class workers profoundly and directly influence the results of postal collective bargaining. For that reason, NALC has pledged to work with our brothers and sisters in the labor movement, led by Rich Trumka, the new president of the AFL-CIO, to help President Obama advance policies that will revive the economy and benefit all working families, starting with health care reform and continuing with the Employee Free Choice Act. At the same time, we have never let up in our fight for financial relief for the United States Postal Service in the midst of this recession. On this, we are making great progress.

**On the same day President Obama addressed** the AFL-CIO delegates (including nine from the NALC), the House of Representatives debated H.R. 22 and passed it by a huge bipartisan margin (388 to 32). This version of H.R. 22, amended to provide more relief up front while limiting it to just one year instead of three, slashed the Postal Service's 2009 pre-funding payment from \$5.4 billion to \$1.4 billion. If adopted by the Senate, the \$4 billion in savings from H.R. 22 would help the Postal Service survive the worst economic recession since the Great Depression. NALC moved vigorously for quick Senate action of the bill and we also are determined to find long-term solutions to this heavy financial burden as well as other reforms to strengthen the Postal Service.

I want to thank the tens of thousands of e-Activists who answered my calls to contact their members of Congress in support of H.R. 22 and urge all of you who have not yet enrolled as an e-Activist to do so immediately by visiting the NALC website, [nalc.org](http://nalc.org). The fight to save the Postal Service from the impact of the Great Recession of 2007-2009 is far from over. With new allies in the White House and the AFL-CIO, I am more convinced than ever that we can succeed. ✉