

# Postal workers rally nationwide, make preparations for next step



**O**n the afternoon of Tuesday, Sept. 27, thousands of NALC members in congressional districts across the country joined our brothers and sisters in the clerk, mailhandler and rural carrier crafts—plus family members, friends and community leaders—for one of the most visible postal rallies ever organized.

The goal of the gatherings was to help generate congressional and large-scale public support of H.R. 1351, the bill introduced by Rep. Stephen Lynch (D-MA) that attempts to address the decades-old accounting error that has led the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to overcharge the Postal Service by billions

televised live on evening TV newscasts and covered prominently in newspapers the following day.

“The sight of so many men and women, all wearing the same blue ‘Save America’s Postal Service’ T-shirts, was an inspiration,” NALC President Fredric V. Rolando said. “And the fact that you couldn’t tell letter carrier from clerk or clerk from mailhandler is just how it should be, since this financial crisis affects all of us equally.”

Rolando joined dozens of Baltimore-area postal workers at the Catonsville office of Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-MD), a longtime friend of the NALC who serves as the ranking member of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee.

“We’ve got to pass 1351,” Cummings told the crowd gathered outside his office. “I just got a note from one of my colleagues saying, ‘Aww, Cummings, you’re just trying to do a bailout.’ But it’s no bailout—this is your money!”

True enough—the overpayments into CSRS and FERS have come entirely from Postal Service profits generated by the sale of postage and parcel services. In fact, the Postal Service hasn’t received a dime of taxpayer money for more than 30 years.

What compounds the Postal Service’s dire financial situation is the requirement under the 2006 postal reform law that forces the USPS to pay \$5.5 billion a year to pre-fund 75 years’ worth of future retiree health benefits within just 10 years, a burden no other company or government agency bears. Thanks to that law, the Postal Service’s books reflect losses over the last four years of about \$20 billion; take it away, and the USPS shows an operational profit of nearly \$700 million—despite the worst recession in more than 80 years and despite dramatic increases in the use of e-mail and online bill payment.

“Getting H.R. 1351 passed is a crucial first step toward restoring the Postal Service to firm financial footing,” Rolando said. “Our September 27 rallies took our message to the masses: Tell Congress to give us back our money, and we can



**NALC President Fredric Rolando listened as Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-MD) vowed to work to pass H.R. 1351 at the rally outside his office.**

of dollars for payments into the USPS’ accounts within the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) and the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS).

Assembling either at or near the home offices of every voting member of the House of Representatives, groups representing the NALC, the American Postal Workers Union, the National Postal Mail Handlers Union and the National Rural Letter Carriers’ Association held up signs and chanted slogans to draw attention to the real financial problems facing the Postal Service. Most House members were scheduled to be at their congressional district offices on Sept. 27, and the afternoon rush hour time of 4:30 to 6 was picked to provide maximum public exposure for the rallies—many of which were



**Above: Rep. Howard Berman (D-CA) showed off his Save America's Postal Service T-shirt.**

**Below: Postal workers rallied in Boise.**

**Bottom: Rep. Jim Renacci (R-OH) revealed his support by appearing at the rally outside his office.**

set aside potentially disastrous cost-cutting proposals to eliminate a day or more of mail delivery service and to close post offices and postal facilities.”

### All across America

The Sept. 27 events took place in just about every one of the country's 435 congressional districts. A number of larger districts held more than one rally, while a few pooled resources with postal workers in neighboring districts to create a larger rally at a highly visible location. Turnout in most locations was both large and enthusiastic.

In Washington state, for example, about two dozen active and retired postal workers handed out fliers and collected petition signatures in downtown Yakima at the office of Rep. Doc Hastings (R-4th) to encourage him to support H.R. 1351.

“Congress has backed the Postal Service management into a corner,” Yakima Branch 852 letter carrier Jerry Gilmore told the *Herald-Republic*. “They should give us a better chance to solve the problems that are giving us financial difficulties.”

“We are the only agency forced to pre-fund our [health benefits] for up to 75 years,” Pasadena, CA Branch 2200

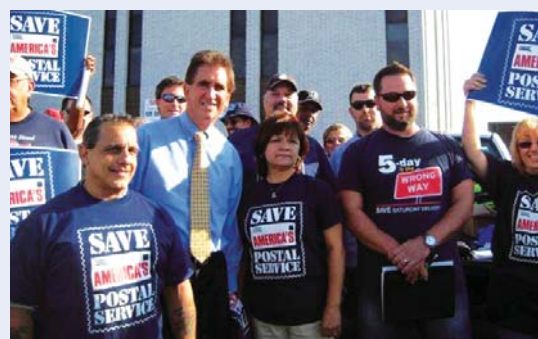
shop steward Carolyn Zorn told the *Star-News* at an event outside the office of Rep. Adam Schiff (D-29th), a co-sponsor of the Lynch bill. “We are forced to pre-fund health care for retirees that haven't been born yet.” About 30 postal workers held signs and led cheers at the Pasadena rally.

Speaking with a reporter from KITV Channel 4 in front of the state capitol building in Honolulu, Branch 860 President Howard Komine explained postal workers' passion behind this issue.

“They care about their job and the people and this company,” he said. “We just want it to be successful.” Both of Hawaii's representatives, Colleen Hanabusa (D-1st) and Mazie Hirono (D-2nd), are H.R. 1351 co-sponsors.

In Scottsbluff, NE, letter carriers and other postal employees rallied outside the office of Rep. Adrian Smith (R-3rd), chanting, “We don't want a bailout—we just want to get the mail out!”

Scottsbluff Branch 1836 President Jacob Wilkins clarified to a *Star-Herald* reporter that the rallies were meant solely to garner greater public and congressional support for H.R. 1351, especially crucial in his eastern Nebraska district since Smith has not yet signed on as a co-sponsor.



## E-ACTIVIST, COLCPE CONTEST DEADLINES NEAR

In today's lightning-fast political climate, the NALC e-Activist Network gets immediate word to members about important issues. As if staying in the know weren't incentive enough, NALC President Fredric Rolando announced in May a contest to encourage more members to sign up—with a \$100 American Express gift card going to 10 lucky e-Activists. But the eligibility deadline of Dec. 1 is just around the corner.

At the end of the year, the NALC will conduct a drawing for 10 \$100 American Express gift cards. To be eligible to win one, you must be on the e-Activist rolls with a valid e-mail address by Dec. 1. Winners will be notified via both postal mail and e-mail.

Also, remember that the e-Activist Network underwent an overhaul this summer. "We've sent a number of national e-Activist messages since the new and improved network went online in July," Rolando said. "So if you thought you were signed up and you haven't gotten any messages in a while, it's a good idea to go online and sign up again, just to make sure."

The link to sign up online as an e-Activist is on the home page at [nalc.org](http://nalc.org).

### Gimme 5 for COLCPE

Another contest whose deadline is drawing closer is this year's COLCPE competition. The union's political action fund, COLCPE helps pay for the NALC's legislative and political activities.

The 2011 competition pits branches of similar size and current Gimme 5 participation rates against each other. Branches with 50-99 members will compete in one group, and those with 100-450 members in another. The largest branches—those with 451 or more members—will compete with each other in groups of three or four.

Branches will win prizes based on the total new Gimme 5 participants they sign up by the end of this month, as well as for the greatest increase in participation percentage. All new and current Gimme 5 participants will be entered into a raffle for additional prizes.

"Every COLCPE dollar helps pro-labor, pro-letter carrier candidates for Congress get their message out," Rolando said.

"We are strictly dealing with legislation," Wilkins said. "We just want Congress to give us our money so we can provide service."

"We just want to get out to the public that we're about service," Branch 1836 Secretary Don Fox added.

Retired Maine letter carrier John Curtis organized a rally event in Bangor at the office of Rep. Mike Michaud (D-2nd). The Central Maine Merged Branch 391 member told *The Ellsworth American* that the Postal Service's financial situation could have a particularly harsh impact on mail customers in rural Maine.

Curtis called the current prep-funding schedule "aggressive."

"It is not realistic, and it has sunk the Postal Service into debt," he said.

Roswell, GA Branch 4862 letter carrier Paul Barner broke down the pension overfunding issue for a reporter from WAGA Channel 5. "We had a bill, and we paid more than we needed to on that bill, so we're asking that the excess money be given back to the Postal Service," he said at a rally near the office of Rep. Tom Price (R-6th), who is not yet a co-sponsor of H.R. 1351.

### Identifying the problem

Recovering the tens of billions of dollars in the CSRS and FERS pension accounts would go a long way toward solving the Postal Service's current financial problems.

"Rep. Lynch's bill would give us access to our own money so we could use it to help cover all of our financial obligations, all without using a dime of taxpayer funds," Rolando said.

But not everyone is in agreement about whether an overpayment into the CSRS fund even exists. Members of the House and Senate requested that the Government Accounting Office (GAO) do another assessment on the issue.

On Oct. 13, the GAO issued a report that reiterated its previously and oft-stated view that the Office of Personnel Management's division between the USPS and the Treasury Department of

Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) pension obligations for employees of the old Post Office Department was "consistent" with the law.

The new report erroneously concluded that since the actuarial methods used by the OPM to allocate these obligations were "reasonable," that there was no overpayment into CSRS by the Postal Service—this despite the finding of numerous other independent studies that show an overfunding figure of between \$50 billion and \$75 billion paid by the Postal Service into CSRS since 1971.

"Unfortunately, advocates of dismantling the Postal Service, such as Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman Darrell Issa, are now claiming that this GAO report ends the debate and that Congress should reject H.R. 1351," President Rolando said. "However, nothing could be further from the truth.

"The fact that GAO has reissued basically the same conclusion it reached in 2003, when it worked with OPM on CSRS funding reform, does not end the debate," Rolando said. "In fact, we would argue that this latest GAO report actually bolsters the case for H.R. 1351, once you weed through the report's misleading arguments." The GAO report and the NALC's detailed response are available for download through [nalc.org](http://nalc.org).

"The GAO report goes so far as to say that methods used by the Postal Regulatory Commission and the USPS Office of Inspector General, the ones that found the \$50 billion to \$75 billion, are 'reasonable' calculation methods, and that the allocation of costs is ultimately a 'policy decision' that Congress could implement," he said.

"And one of the best ways to implement such a policy decision would be to pass H.R. 1351," Rolando said.

### Pushing through H.R. 2309

The same day the GAO issued its report, the GOP-controlled House Oversight and Government Reform Committee "marked up" and passed

# HIDDEN SUPPORT, MISSING RYAN

**T**he idea behind the Sept. 27 Save America's Postal Service rallies was a simple one: To go to House members' home offices and either thank those members who signed on as co-sponsors of H.R. 1351 or urge those who had not signed on to the bill to do so.

But perhaps reflecting today's political realities, there were a few congressional districts where it really wasn't so simple. In a handful of cases, House members who are official, on-the-record co-sponsors of H.R. 1351 actually asked rally organizers in their districts not to turn up at their offices and say thank you.

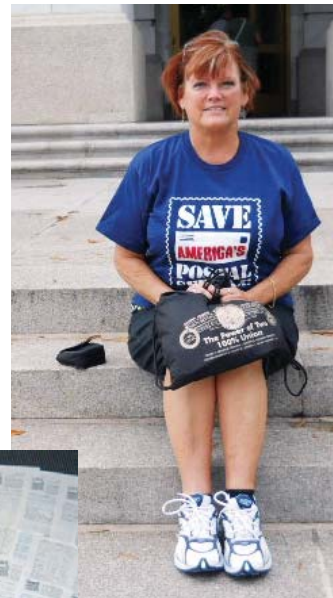
"Some members were worried that it might hurt them politically if constituents found out they were signed on," President Fredric Rolando remarked with a smile. "Ultimately, it doesn't matter—what matters is that their names still show up on the co-sponsor list." Rallies in those districts wound up taking place a politically safe distance away from those representatives' offices.

A somewhat different story evolved in Wisconsin's 1st Congressional District. Ahead of the Sept. 27 rally at Rep. Paul Ryan's office, site organizers confirmed that the office of the seven-term Republican would be open and that someone there—perhaps Ryan himself—would be on hand to accept pro-H.R. 1351 petitions.

"The Kenosha office was supposed to be open until 5 o'clock," reported National NALC Auxiliary Secretary Marie Rasmussen. "But when we got there at 4 to set up, the lights were off, the office was empty, and word was that the staff had sneaked out the back door to avoid us!"

The rally went on as planned, but the petitions went undelivered. As it happened, however, Rasmussen had planned to come to Washington later that week, and decided to personally drop off the petitions at Ryan's Longworth Building office on Capitol Hill on Oct. 1.

"His staff was very polite, but when they learned I was a representative of a labor union, you could tell they were a little suspicious about what we were up to," Rasmussen said with a laugh. "We still hope the congressman will change his mind and sign on as an H.R. 1351 co-sponsor, but at least we know for sure the petitions were delivered."



**Auxiliary Secretary Marie Rasmussen on the steps outside Rep. Paul Ryan's (R-WI)**

**Washington office, after she delivered the signed petitions (l).**

its radical and partisan "postal reform" bill offered by Chairman Issa. The measure passed by a narrow 20-18 margin.

But rather than address the postal crisis caused by the pre-funding mandate, the Issa bill seeks to exploit the financial meltdown to advance anti-worker ideological goals. Radically downsizing the government and gutting the collective-bargaining rights of hardworking postal employees appear to be the main goals of the legislation.

"Unfortunately, by calling for the destruction of the hub of a \$1.3 trillion industry that employs 7.5 million private-sector workers, H.R. 2309 may be the most anti-business bill taken up by Congress in years," Rolando said. "Slashing service and forcing a massive round of post office closings would seriously damage the printing, publishing, paper and financial services industries.

"At a time of massive unemployment, H.R. 2309 would mandate, not just lead to, the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs."

Although it can now proceed to a vote by the full House, Sen. Tom Carper, chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management (which oversees the Postal Service)

expressed some concerns about the bill's overall prospects for passage.

"While I welcome Congressman Issa and Congressman Ross' interest in addressing the Postal Service's serious financial challenges, I remain concerned that their current partisan approach to crafting a legislative solution can't pass the Senate and, just as important, can't effectively solve the Postal Service's significant financial problems," he said. "Not only does this approach pass the buck in an unacceptable manner, it likely would be found unconstitutional and certainly wouldn't be the kind of quick and cost-effective resolution that the Postal Service needs."

## In the upper chamber

Other news coming from the Senate side of the Hill proved just as challenging to letter carriers' patience.

Carper, who has authored his own postal financial reform bill, called the disagreement over the CSRS overpayment that continued with the GAO report "significant."

"I believe it would be more prudent to set aside this question for the time being in order to focus on the areas of postal reform where we have more consensus, including the Postal Service's overpayment into the Federal



**Not even Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA) could avoid the postal workers who rallied in his district.**



**Top: Carriers and other union workers were out in force in St. Louis.**

**Above: Plenty of representatives to thank in Buffalo**

**Even a UPS driver lent his support for saving the Postal Service in Appleton, WI.**



Employees Retirement System,” Carper said in a statement.

While Carper’s plan contains many positive ideas, there are pieces of the bill that the NALC cannot support, including cutting a day or more of mail delivery service and enshrining into law the notion that the arbitration process needs revising to help management’s case.

“Cutting service and inconveniencing customers is not a way to strengthen the Postal Service,” Rolando said. “Many customers rely on Saturday mail delivery, and reducing the speed and quality of service will simply drive them away.

“And arbitrators are required to consider all the evidence presented to them by the parties,” he said. “To claim otherwise is just wrong.”

Meanwhile, Sen. Max Baucus (D-MT) has introduced his own bill designed to ease the Postal Service’s obligation to pre-fund future retiree health benefits.

Baucus’ measure would require the Office of Personnel Management to use the \$6.9 billion FERS surplus to cover the Postal Service’s current payment into the future retiree health benefit fund—now due Nov. 18. It would also return the USPS’ CSRS surplus.

“We applaud Senator Baucus for the positive step he’s taken to address Postal Service finances and the maintenance of services to the American people,” President Rolando said. “The Postal Service is the centerpiece of a \$1.3 trillion mailing industry that supports about 8 million American jobs, so it is incumbent on Congress to address the financial burdens it has imposed on the USPS—and not to dismantle this valuable universal network.”

## Next steps

Building on the overwhelming success of the Sept. 27 Save America’s

Postal Service rallies, the NALC is joining forces with the National Rural Letter Carriers’ Association on a new mission.

“We’re asking each of our members to collect 10 petition signatures in support of saving six-day mail delivery and passing H.R. 1351,” Rolando said.

“Cutting out Saturday mail delivery service would be an enormous mistake,” he said. “A 17 percent cut in service just to chase 3 percent in cost savings is absurd.”

Also, dropping a day—or more—of mail delivery service would put thousands of postal jobs at risk as well. “Unemployment in this country hovers at 9 percent, and there is little reason to believe that figure will go down any time soon,” Rolando said. “To throw away another 80,000 middle-class postal jobs does not make sense, especially when there are more reasonable solutions on the table.

“On its own, the NALC has 280,000 active and retired members,” Rolando said. “I have no doubt that each of us can find 10 people who support keeping Saturday mail delivery. And combining forces with our brothers and sisters in the rural craft—it would be a marvelous thing indeed if we could present a million or more signatures to our elected representatives, demonstrating that Saturday mail delivery is indeed worth saving.”

A petition and flier can be found on the following two pages and are also available at [saveamericaspostalservice.org](http://saveamericaspostalservice.org).

Petitions are due at NALC Headquarters by Nov. 14, so time is short. Please return the petitions to the Department of Legislative and Political Affairs at NALC Headquarters.

“Our goal is to tabulate the number of signatures we collect and then take out full-page ads in key newspapers listing those numbers,” Rolando said. The timeline is so aggressive, he said, because the unions want to have the signatures gathered in time to present them to the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction—the “super

committee”—which will be entertaining postal proposals as part of its overall deficit-reduction mission.

“Our drive is made all the more urgent,” Rolando noted, “because President Obama’s own deficit-reduction proposal includes allowing the Postal Service the flexibility to cut Saturday mail delivery.

“We know the American people don’t support such a cut, and we want to gather enough signatures to prove it,” he said.

## In the news

Meanwhile, President Rolando continues his full-court press on the media to spread the truth about the Postal Service’s financial situation.

On Sept. 21, he was interviewed for a story for “Federal Times Newsmaker,” a video presentation of *Federal Times*. The president spoke convincingly about some of the strategies required to solve the Postal Service’s financial problems.

“The last four fiscal years, the Postal Service has made an operational profit of almost \$700 million,” he said. “But because of a 2006 law, they’ve been required to pay into this pre-funding account about \$21 billion, and that accounts for every penny—and more—of the losses.

“So we’re talking about being required to pay premiums for people that don’t work for us yet, in fact for some people that aren’t even born yet,” he said.

Two days later, Rolando made a second appearance on TV in the DC area live on NewsChannel 8’s “Capital Insider,” program, which has a large audience in the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia among federal employees, contractors and others involved with the federal government.

On Sept. 24, America’s Work Force Radio aired its interview with President Rolando on WERE-AM 1490 in the Cleveland area. That weekend, the president traveled to Buffalo for a retirement dinner, where he took the opportunity to lay out the Postal Service’s issues for

*The Buffalo News*. His remarks were also carried on Buffalo’s WIVB Channel 4.

And the day of the Save America’s Postal Service rallies, Rolando was a featured guest on National Public Radio’s “The Diane Rehm Show,” and an article in that day’s Huffington Post quoted the president extensively.

“Someone is choosing to take our communications system apart,” Rolando said. “That’s what you’re seeing discussed—the reduction of delivery days, the reduction in service standards, the consolidation of processing plants. It’s just a dismantling of the service as we know it.”

Links to these and many more appearances can be found at [nalc.org/PostalFacts](http://nalc.org/PostalFacts).

“What individual letter carriers need to do is stay informed, stay educated, talk to their friends, talk to their families, talk to their neighbors—educate people,” Rolando said. “Let them know the truth about the Postal Service, because the truth is very simple: The Postal Service is so far from broke, and if we are broke, we’re the richest broke company in America.” ✉

## Correction

The NALC Financial Statement published in the August issue of *The Postal Record* contained a technical glitch that shifted the last digit in most of the totals to the right.

The numbers were merely shifted one digit, but were otherwise accurate. We apologize for any confusion and the revised statement can be found in *The Postal Record* section of the NALC website.



Top: Lincoln, NE saw a good turnout for the informational picket.

Above: The Save America’s Postal Service T-shirts and signs attracted a lot of attention in Brooklyn.