

The GARDEN STATE LETTER CARRIER



"127 Years Serving Letter Carriers"

Official Publication of the New Jersey State Association of Letter Carriers

Volume LXXII, No. 1

WWW.NJSALC.COM

Issue #1 2021

President's Report

Richard P. O'Connell, Jr., President



On January 3, 2021, the 117th Congress was convened. Three days later, we all witnessed an unprecedented attack on our Capitol building. I cannot adequately express my dismay and shock while watching the recordings of the attack, especially the destruction and carelessness of the perpetrators. Our prayers go out to those who lost their lives or were

injured, especially New Jersey's own, Officer Brian D. Sicknick, of the Capital Police Force.

In years past, our annual Congressional Conference has provided an opportunity for many letter carriers to walk through the hallways of the Capital building to visit our Congressional Representatives and Senators. It was truly an honor and a privilege. It remains to be seen if or when we may have that opportunity again. The attack, however, did not stop the 117th Congress from returning to the Capitol and continuing their duties.

Members of the House of Representatives and Senate have introduced several pieces of legislation that will protect letter carriers' jobs and benefits, and support Postal reform. Similar legislation has been introduced in the past, but the legislation will be assigned new bill or resolution numbers, due to the fact we have a new Congress. Another difference during this Congress is that friends of NALC and the Postal Service will have control over what is allowed to be considered and voted upon. We also have a friend in the White House, who is more likely to sign into law legislation favorable to the Postal Service and its employees.

The House of Representatives has introduced three resolutions: H. Res. 109, H. Res. 47, and H. Res. 114. The resolution, H. Res. 109 Door Delivery, will continue door delivery

for all business and residential customers. The second resolution, H. Res. 47 Anti-privatization, ensures the USPS continues to be an independent establishment of the Federal Government and will not be subject to privatization. The third resolution, H. Res. 114 Six Day Delivery, warrants the United States Postal Service to continue six day mail delivery service.

The House of Representatives has introduced two bills: H.R. 82 and H. R. 695. The bill, H. R. 82 Social Security Act, repeals the provisions reducing Social Security benefits if an individual receives benefits from a state or local government. Most importantly, H.R. 695 USPS Fairness Act, will end the requirement for the USPS to prepay future retiree health benefits. The Senate has introduced a companion bill, S. 145 USPS Fairness Act, with the same requirements.

It is evident that our established relationships with our Congressional Representatives will be called upon seeking support of the proposed legislation. Each NALC member should be familiar with their representative, and be prepared to contact them when called upon. Do not rely on someone else to make the call. We will need all active and retired members to support our efforts. If you are unsure of who your representative is, visit NJSALC.com, and click on legislation. There you will be able to locate your representatives.

As we approach the one-year anniversary of the onset of the coronavirus, I thank all letter carriers for their continued efforts to continue to complete their appointed rounds every day. We must continue to follow the practices designed to protect the safety and health of our members and their families. Please continue to practice social distancing, wear a face covering, and continuously take the time to wash your hands. Even though the vaccines are becoming more available, the virus is still a threat to each and every one of us. Please continue to protect yourself every day, and return home to your loved ones safely. ☐

THE GARDEN STATE LETTER CARRIER

Published by the N.J. State Association of Letter Carriers

Four times a year

Jeffry M. Fox, Editor

Richard P. O'Connell, Jr., President

-Affiliates-

National Association of Letter Carriers—AFL-CIO

The opinions expressed in these columns are not necessarily the views of the Editor, State Association or its members.

Advertising rates will be sent upon request.

Non-Profit postage paid at Lakewood, NJ 08701

NJSALC circulation office:

91 Mansfield Avenue, Manchester, NJ 08759

The Garden State Letter Carrier is paid for through membership dues

ISSN-0745-1970

OFFICERS 2019- 2021

President

RICHARD O'CONNELL, Jr.- Branch 38

Livingston - (973) 714-7361

First Vice-President

NELSON GASKILL - Branch 903

Cape Atlantic - (609) 214-3970

Second Vice-President

PETE BEDNARZ - Branch 38

Clifton - (973) 650-4636

Secretary

JOE RUTKOSKI - Branch 38

Mt Arlington - (908) 456-1463

Treasurer

JEFFRY FOX - Branch 425

Teaneck - (201) 981-0790

Director of Education

CHRISTINE STRASSER - Branch 38

East Brunswick - (732) 266-1565

Sergeant-at-Arms

KEITH HEMMINGS - Branch 38

Orange - (973) 223-6740

Director of Retirees

RON VILLEGAS - Branch 38

Old Bridge - (732) 947-1409

EXECUTIVE BOARD

GARY DIGIACOMO - Branch 908

South Jersey - (856) 906-2838

EDDIE FITZ - Branch 38

Irvington - (973) 220-8979

RICHARD FOLMER - Branch 268

Princeton - (609) 647-6274

RAY GIANOTTI - Branch 2128

Toms River - (908) 910-4093

CHUCK GOUSHIAN - Branch 540

Camden - (856) 745-5228

DONALD HILL - Branch 120

Paterson - (862) 823-1677

GARY LANGE - Branch 444

South Amboy - (732) 771-6691

JOHN PHAIR - Branch 5420

Brick - (732) 299-4589

BRUCE STALLWORTH - Branch 924

Freehold - (732) 822-5297

STEVE SZCZESNY - Branch 42

Jersey City - (908) 202-2623

Attorney-at-Law

DONALD MILLMAN

111Northfield Ave., Suite 201

West Orange, NJ 07052

(973) 669-9776

VIEWPOINT

Jeff Fox, Editor



The election is over, Joe Biden is the 46th President of the United States of America; in addition, both Senate seats in Georgia flipped to Democrats. For the first time since 2008, Democrats control the House of Representatives, the Senate, and the White House. It's time to get some work done!

On page 4 of this edition, you'll see two bills listed that were recently introduced in the House. USPS Fairness

Act H.R. 695 was introduced on 2/2/2021; the Senate introduced the same bill, S. 145. This bill will repeal the requirement that the USPS prepay future retirement benefits (roughly 5 billion dollars a year). This obligation has crippled the USPS since 2006 when it was originally passed. No other government agency or private company has had this onerous obligation put upon their business.

Additionally, H.R. 82, the Social Security Fairness Act, was introduced in the House on 1/04/2021. This bill would repeal provisions that reduce Social Security benefits for individuals who receive other benefits, such as a pension from a state or local government. This bill is especially important to our Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) retirees who are unfairly having their Social Security benefits slashed by two-thirds.

Both of these bills have bipartisan support, both Democrats and Republicans support these bills. These bills have been introduced in Congress before. So what's the difference now? The difference is that Democrats have control of the Senate; the party who is in control of the Senate decides which bills come up for a vote and for some reason Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY) would not let these bills ever see the light of day. Politics is much more complicated than it needs to be. If the majority of Republicans support the USPS and their corresponding legislation then why is the party as a whole set against helping us? Well, there is no need to ask that question anymore since Senator McConnell will no longer decide which bills come up for a vote; that decision is now up to Senator Schumer (D-NY) who has always been a friend of letter carriers.

Will these bills pass? When will they be passed? I can't answer these questions at present. But, I can tell you that at least we now have a fighting chance. Stay safe and be well. ☰

Empathy

Larry Cirelli, NBA Region 15



It is mid-February and near midnight. I have just finished the last of my emails and have some time to relax. As I am a news junkie, I decided to play President Biden's Townhall Meeting on one of the news networks that I have recorded. I am floored by one of the actions of President Biden.

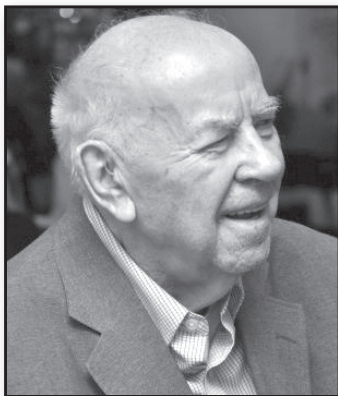
Now this is not a political article. I am not going to go into party lines and actions, democrat, republican or independent positions, this article is not going to address that. What I am going to address is empathy for our fellow human beings. During President Biden's meeting, a little girl was with her mother who told the President that her daughter was scared of dying of COVID. Biden addressed the little girl directly. She could not have been more than 7 years old, but he took the time to explain things to her, to tell her not to worry and things would be better soon. Simply talking to the child is not even the point, the point was the empathy President Biden had with the child. You could see it on his face that he cared. You could see it on the face of the little girl that he connected with her. It was an incredible moment and one I had to take to heart.

We as union officials put in long hours during one of the most trying times in the USPS and NALC history. We are

experiencing more delivery issues than ever while being incredibly shorthanded. At any time, we are down 15 thousand to 20 thousand employees. This is making it almost impossible to process and deliver the mail. 10 and 12 hour days are the norm. This is causing us to be short tempered and a little self-centered, more concerned about ourselves than about others, more concerned about our problems than to see those around us with serious issues and in need of help. We have family, friends, and co-workers in need of assistance. Sometimes all they need is a pat on the back. Sometimes all they need is someone to listen to their problems. This could just be pressures they are having at home, childcare and the like, or some issue at work that needs your attention as an union representative. We take the problem and try to solve it but sometimes with miss connecting with the person.

The NALC has always prided ourselves with helping others. From coat drives to Christmas toys for the poor. From MDA to March of Dimes, from disaster relief to the largest food drive in the world, we help, but don't let the action prevent you from connecting to the person. Connect. Talk. Listen. Be the best union representative you can be but also be the best person you can be. Don't forget the person behind the problem. Don't forget to deal with the person. Don't forget there are others who need your help. Don't forget your empathy. If the President of the United States can do it with a child, there is no reason we can't. ☐

Long-time Branch 908 leader Bill Revak passes away



NALC is deeply saddened to learn that 91-year-old retired letter carrier and Branch 908 leader Bill Revak, passed away in his sleep on Saturday, February 6th. Brother Revak's storied 35-year career with the Postal Service began in 1956 after serving his country in Korea with the U.S. Army.

Brother Revak became President of Branch 908 in 1962. He attended his first NALC convention in 1964 in Miami – his first of over 20 biennial conventions in a row as a delegate. In 1970, he led Branch 908 to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the members of Branch 36 during the Great Postal Strike. In 1973, he began merging other NALC branches in South Jersey with Branch 908 – ultimately growing the

branch to 27 offices and 724 active and retired members today. In 1975 Bill was the national vice-president running mate of NALC icon Vince Sombrotto. He was a feared arbitration advocate for NALC, and was responsible for saving the careers of many letter carriers during his time.

"He will be sorely missed, but his contributions to our branch and the union will live on," current NALC Branch 908 President Gary DiGiacomo said. "He was a true unionist and always had the membership come first and taught everyone in our branch the importance of being in the union."

"Our entire NALC membership grieves the loss of Brother Revak," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "Leaders such as Bill blazed the trail and cleared the path for the rest of us. Without the dedication to this union of people such as him, we wouldn't be where we are today. Our sincere condolences and heartfelt prayers go out to his family, friends, and loved ones." ☐

American Labor Stands for the Common Person

Chuck Goushian, Executive Board



I was going to write an article about the new tentative agreement. I would have said how pleased and proud I was in our national officers for being able to hammer out a last minute deal with management which includes general wage increases and COLA's in the midst of our employer's most devastating financial crisis ever, but it would seem pale in light of what has

happened in our nation's capital. Just when we thought things were going to start turning around, the then president of the United States incited an armed mob to subvert democracy and attack our nation's capital building.

I visit Washington DC every year, along with our state's delegation, for our annual Congressional Reception. We enjoy the view as we walk past the Capitol Building on our way to the Rayburn Building, the Cannon building, and others. We go to these places with a purpose of self-determination and unity. We engage in the democratic process. We interact with our nation's representatives and participate in the cultivation of law and policy. The violent insurgency of January 6 was an abomination to the American ideals I was raised to believe. Because of real patriots, our institutions are withstanding the assault.

I thank the poll workers and ballot counters, as well as other county and state workers, who performed their duties at a time like no other. They put themselves in harm's way. They risked their health by exposing themselves to potentially contracting the Covid-19 virus; they withstood the shouts and taunts of protesters, and even dealt with threats of violence against them and their families. Their sense of personal integrity, civic responsibility and love of country, are one of the main reasons we are able to enjoy the rights and liberties that make the United States the greatest bastion of freedom in the world. Of course, I am proud of letter carriers and other postal employees. We held up our end by providing the efficiency and trust needed to maintain the sanctity of the vote.

Now more than ever, it's important for all of us to keep in touch with our elected officials. Let them know who you are. Let them know how you feel about things. Don't just call when they are doing something you don't like, let them know when you feel they are doing something good too. Republican or Democrat, right, left, or somewhere in between; we all have skin in the game and it's time we all act like it. I'm certain most of us were, in the least, dismayed over the scenes from Washington DC on January 6th. Let our politicians see letter carriers are united in a common goal. Let your representatives know we stand together for our common good. Show them that American Labor stands for the common person. ☑

NALC Priority Congressional Bills and Resolutions

Below are bills of note for NALC that have been introduced in the 117th Congress. This page will be updated regularly as bills are introduced.

House Bills

USPS Fairness Act - H.R. 695

Status: Introduced February 2, 2021 by Peter DeFazio (D-OR), Tom Reed (R-NY), Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) and Collin Allred (D-TX)

Co-sponsors: 237 (204 Democrats – 33 Republicans)

To repeal the requirement that the United States Postal Service prepay future retirement benefits.

Social Security Fairness Act - H.R. 82

Status: Introduced January 4, 2021

Co-sponsors: 58 (37 Democrats – 21 Republicans)

To repeal provisions that reduce Social Security benefits for individuals who receive other benefits, such as a pension from a state or local government.

Our Work is Never Done

Marc Ashmon, Legislative Political Organizer (LPO)



As letter carriers we do much more than carry mail. Many of us play vital roles in the NALC, from supporting the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) to organizing our annual food drive. Shop Stewards represent the membership in the grievance procedure from the pre-disciplinary investigation all the way to arbitration if needed.

Once we start filing grievances consistently, we begin to send a message to management that we will not allow them to violate the contract or disrespect our members. Often, management will grow to respect the union and learn to play nice in the sandbox. However, soon as there is a change in the guard (new PM or Supervisor) we must start from scratch to reestablish our position and take back the workroom floor. Our work is never done.

This is the same for those letter carriers who represent the membership on the legislative side. The Letter Carrier Congressional Liaison (LCCL) meets with their respective member of congress (MOC) in district. The state president has the responsibility to oversee the LCCLs as well as deliver our legislative message to everyone within their state. Our beloved retirees work on campaigns during election cycles, directly contacting union households by texting, phone banking and leaving pamphlets/signs to conjure up political support for the candidate the NALC is supporting. Lastly the legislative political organizer (LPO) is there as a resource for all the above.

Legislative Political Organizer (LPO) is a new full time position created by the NALC to serve the membership in a variety of ways, including educating members on the current state of legislation, training & assisting state associations & branches to help carry out our plan, meeting with members of congress & educating members on the importance of the LCPF.

Marc T. Ashmon has been a letter carrier for 25 years & is a Leadership Academy graduate of class 16. Prior to his appointment as LPO he held various positions in the NALC- branch president for 9 yrs., route inspection team, NALC observer & NJ State Food Drive Coordinator. Marc's territory as LPO includes 10 states, 4 Regions (11,12,14,15) and the Caribbean (Puerto Rico & Virgin Islands)

These letter carriers did some really special things legislatively, from getting strong bipartisan support on legislation that could dramatically change our job as we know it, to pushing HR 2382 (a bill to repeal the prefunding mandate) through the House making it to Senate Bill 2965. Additionally, they campaigned to educate union members on the importance of getting out to vote for pro labor candidates. This year was exceptionally challenging to maneuver due to the global pandemic as we could not knock on doors and have that personal contact.

All the hard work that letter carriers put in starts over now. There will be some new member of congress along with new number and/or language changes. As a result, we must continue to cultivate and build strong relationships with our MOC. Furthermore, we must also make a conscious effort to educate our fellow letter carriers on the importance of contributing to the Letter Carrier Political Fund. The LCPF identifies and contributes to candidates who support issues important to all letter carriers and raises money for the purpose of defeating or electing candidates to office.

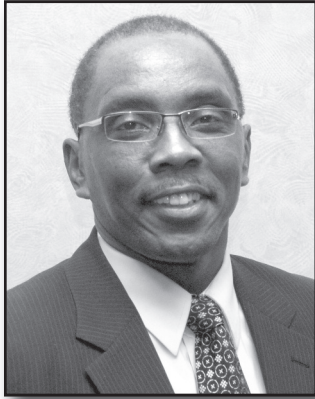
We made a giant step in the right direction by President elect Joe Biden winning the presidency and fortunately he put our chief of staff Jim Sauber on his transition team. Quite a stark difference from the current administration who disregarded our questionnaire and painted us in a bad light at every turn. Although we have a strong ally in our corner, there are still others lurking in the shadows that think our business model is outdated and want us gone. We must remember, our work is never done. ☑

Marc T Ashmon, LPO
ashmon@nalc.org cell #: 202-288-7440



The United States Constitution and the National Agreement

Bruce Stallworth, Executive Board



The backbone of our democracy is the United States Constitution. The backbone of the relationship between the United States Postal Service and its Letter Carriers is the National Agreement. The “leaders” of both take an oath to preserve, protect and defend each, by and only by the processes put in place by the authors to do so. Any grievances for alleged violations are resolved by what is meant to be an independent authority. When necessary, the Supreme Court interprets the Constitution and an Arbitrator interprets the National Agreement.

They are alike in many ways, yet each stands on their own in outlining the rights and privileges afforded citizens and letter carriers. The authors of both documents intended for our system or norms to be based on trust; trust that each agreement would be executed in good faith, and not be interpreted or used for self-gain. The US Constitution has just 7 Articles, but it is more defined by its 27 Amendments. The National Agreement contains 43 Articles and has been amended numerous times through negotiations and memorandums. Nevertheless, the essential intent of the United States Constitution and the National Agreement remains the same. To provide its people with the same rights and privileges regardless of race, religion or gender. The right to pursue happiness in whatever you choose to do.

I recall as a new Branch President in the early 90’s attending a National Rap Session in Philadelphia on a tentative agreement. Union representatives were having a spirited debate on the finer points of the proposed agreement. The words, then National President Vincent R. Sombrotto, spoke from the podium are as clear to me today as they were then. He responded to a fellow union member and asked, “Democracy only works, when it works in your favor?” Wow, how profound! I cannot help but immediately think how we as branch leaders and letter carriers protest when the vote does not go our way; but, when it does, everything is fine. Was President Sombrotto comparing the National Agreement to the United States Constitution?

As branch officers, we take an oath to preserve, protect and defend the National Agreement. That means for the members we serve. One of the most inexcusable failures for a representative is the filing of an untimely grievance. The National Agreement in Article 15 clearly outlines the representative’s obligation for appealing a grievance. It states in relevant parts:

Informal Step A

(a) Any employee who feels aggrieved must discuss the grievance with the employee’s immediate supervisor within fourteen (14) days of the date on which the employee or the Union first learned or may reasonably have been expected to have learned of its cause. This constitutes the Informal Step A filing date.

How about an example of what I mean? The union representative presents management with a Request for Information or Union time for an alleged violation of Article 8 on February 12, 2021. The manager tells him/her I will give it to you later, I am too busy right now, or they may tell the representative, I need you to do a pivot today. However, days go by and the representative has not received the information or the time. Even though you have not had a chance to initiate the grievance, the clock is ticking. The violation occurred on the 12th and the union was reasonably aware on the same day. Management finally gives you the information. By the time you review it and are able to prove the violation and meet at the Informal Step A, it is March 2. The trust factor is obliterated because management declares the grievance untimely and it is!

One of my past District Manager’s used a term often, which I later found out came from a former US President, “*Trust but Verify*”. Trust that the manager will give you the information and time requested in the proper time but verify that they do. Trust that the manager will operate in good faith to resolve the grievance but verify that they do.

It is up to you, as the union representative, not only to preserve, protect and defend the rights of the members, but to preserve, protect and defend the National Agreement.

In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress ... Booker T Washington. ☐

2021 Richard P. O’Connell Scholarship Program

The New Jersey State Association of Letter Carriers (NJSALC) is now accepting applications for the 2021 Richard P. O’Connell Scholarship Program. All requests for applications must be sent to the scholarship committee chair by April 2, 2021. The Chair will send scholarship packets to all applicants. Completed packets must be returned to the Chair by May 3, 2021. The scholarships are available to the dependent children of members of NALC Branches within the state of New Jersey. Applicant’s parent/guardian must be a member in good standing of the NALC for at least one (1) year prior to making application. Applicants must be a high school senior when completing the application. The scholarship chair must receive ALL requested information by dates indicated above. O’Connell Scholarship Awards are issued in the year of high school graduation only.

Christine Strasser – O’Connell Scholarship Chair

9 Weamaconk Drive
Englishtown, NJ 07726
38strasser@verizon.net

O’Connell Scholarship Application (Please Print)

Applicant’s Name _____

NALC Member Name _____

Home Address _____

City / State / ZIP _____

Home Telephone _____ Cell _____

Email Address _____

Applicant’s Signature _____

NALC Member Signature _____

Relationship to Applicant _____

Local NALC Branch Officer Signature required for verification of member in good standing:

Branch Officer Signature _____ Title _____

Branch Officer Printed Name _____

Branch Number _____ Branch City _____ Date _____

Application also available online at: NJSALC.com

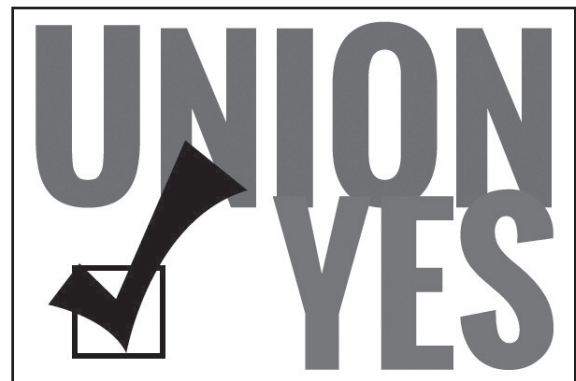


Garden State Letter Carrier
c/o NJSALC
P.O. Box 333
Teaneck, NJ 07666-0333

NON-PROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

PERMIT # 586
LAKEWOOD
NEW JERSEY



By making a contribution to the Letter Carrier Political Fund, you are doing so voluntarily with the understanding that your contribution is not a condition of membership in the National Association of Letter Carriers or of employment by the Postal Service, nor is it part of union dues. You have a right to refuse to contribute without any reprisal. The Letter Carrier Political Fund will use the money it receives to contribute to candidates for federal office and undertake other political spending as permitted by law. Your selection shall remain in full force and effect until cancelled. Contributions to the Letter Carrier Political Fund are not deductible for federal income tax purposes. Federal law prohibits the Letter Carrier Political Fund from soliciting contributions from individuals who are not NALC members, executive and administrative staff or their families. Any contribution received from such an individual will be refunded to that contributor. Federal law requires us to use our best efforts to collect and report the name, mailing address, occupation and name of employer of individuals whose contributions exceed \$200 per calendar year. Any guideline amount is merely a suggestion, and an individual is free to contribute more or less than the guideline suggests and the Union will not favor or disadvantage anyone by reason of the amount of their contribution or their decision not to contribute. ☐