

employees, and we will be filing a National-level appeal on this issue if it cannot be resolved.

Protecting the Mail Handler Craft

For reasons described earlier, there has been a substantial drop in mail volume, and this has caused an equally substantial, if not alarming, drop in the number of career Mail Handlers employed by the Postal Service. Four years ago, in August 2008, there were 56,300 mail handlers, whereas today that number has dropped to only 45,000, meaning that the Mail Handler craft has seen a decrease of almost 20% in the total number of Mail Handlers. In addition, the NPMHU expects another 3,000 Mail Handlers to retire on or before August 31, 2012, putting the total reduction at approximately 25% of complement.

As the Postal Service continues to downsize through attrition, Mail Handlers must continue to battle to preserve their jobs against jurisdictional challenges, against subcontracting to private entities, and against the free riders who take union wages and union benefits without paying their fair share of union costs. The NPMHU has waged these battles—with great success—for the past 100 years, and must continue these efforts without fail.

Legislative Lobbying and Political Action

The National Union often tells Mail Handlers that, with one stroke of a pen, decades of progress can be obliterated by an uncaring Congress and an unfriendly White House. That is why legislative and political action are both so critical to the future of all Mail Handlers. And never in the 100 year history of the NPMHU has this been more true than today, when anti-worker forces are in control of Congress, and draconian proposals are being introduced, with the claim that they are deficit-cutting measures, but in reality they are aimed directly at postal and federal employees, and at the Postal Service as a government enterprise.

The entire American labor movement has come to recognize that the political arena holds the key to many of its most important goals. This is more true for Mail Handlers represented by the NPMHU than for most American workers, for our very jobs and most important benefits are dependent on actions taken by Members of Congress and the current occupant of the White House. There is no other group of employees—besides other postal or federal employees—for

whom retirement benefits, health insurance, workers' compensation, and life insurance are determined by the actions or inactions of the political branches of our National Government. Nor is there any other employee group whose employer is also so dependent on the views and actions of these political branches. It necessarily follows that all Mail Handlers, and certainly the Union that seeks to provide effective representation for Mail Handlers, must maximize their involvement in the political processes that control the Federal Government.

Put simply, that is why the National Union has remained so focused on its legislative and political programs during the past four years. Under the leadership of the National Executive Board, our Legislative and Political Director, and the Committee on the Future of the NPMHU, the National Union has strengthened its legislative lobbying efforts, while increasing its involvement in the electoral political process.

First and foremost, the bi-annual Legislative Conference, most recently held in 2009 and 2011 to coincide with the first session of each new Congress, has become the focal point of the NPMHU's legislative efforts. Not only are hundreds of Mail Handler activists educated about current legislative issues and the legislative process, but their visits with Members of Congress and professional staff have continued to, quite literally, open the doors for the NPMHU. It is now commonplace for important Senators and Representatives to seek the views and opinions of NPMHU officers and other activists on the key postal and related issues pending before Congress. Leadership in these ongoing efforts has been provided by Bob Losi, who serves as Legislative & Political Director for the NPMHU, and also by Senior Legislative Advisor Roger Blacklow.

The NPMHU also has greatly expanded its efforts—and its results—in raising money for its Political Action Committee. Because many members do not realize that the Union's dues revenues may not be contributed to political candidates, it has taken some time to increase the rates of participation in the Mail Handler PAC. But recent trends are extremely encouraging. Using the salary allotment program that the NPMHU implemented through the Postal Service, members have chosen to apportion a small amount of their paycheck each pay period for direct allocation into the PAC. Many Local Unions also have done a superb job of encouraging their officers and stewards to contribute to

the PAC, as a means of demonstrating leadership by example to the rank and file. As a result, the numbers of Mail Handlers routinely contributing to the PAC, while still small, has increased geometrically in the last few years. Thus, our total contributions have increased each and every year, and we expect an all-time record to be set during 2012. Each and every one of those dollars will go toward supporting our friends on Capitol Hill.

All of these efforts are aimed at one objective: to ensure that the NPMHU is able to influence legislation or impact congressional oversight that will directly affect the work lives of the Mail Handlers that the Union represents. The upcoming federal elections in November 2012 promise to be another watershed in American political history, and the NPMHU's political efforts must continue.

Postal Reform: For almost twenty years, ever since 1995, the NPMHU's principal legislative issue has been amendment of the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970, often called postal reform. Our work always is centered around two important objectives: to ensure that the Postal Service can survive amongst the modern system of communications in the 21st century, and to guarantee that the right to collective bargaining and the resulting wages and benefits of postal employees are preserved.

With these goals in mind, the NPMHU became a key player in the debate and ultimate enactment of postal reform legislation in December 2006, in the form of the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act (PAEA). To be sure, the PAEA was not a perfect bill. It capped price increases at the rate of inflation by class of mail, subject to exceptions for unexpected conditions and price increases previously banked, thereby potentially creating a wage cap for future negotiations. It also included an unjustified cut in OWCP benefits that was aimed only at postal employees. That provision—moving the 3-day waiting period so that it applies before an injured employee receives 45 days of COP or Continuation of Pay—was enacted without any evidence or hearings to justify the cut in benefits.

But the PAEA also made clear that collective bargaining will remain the touchstone of labor relations in the Postal Service for decades to come. Congress correctly rejected the most onerous recommendations issued by President Bush's Commission on the Future of the Postal Service, and also provided the Postal Service with additional flexibility in developing products, setting