ride our local mail now takes up to Albany for canceling before it’s sent back to Newburgh for the final stages of processing. “That’s delaying the mail now,” said Lawlor Roth. “Everyone has felt it.” But it’ll be even worse should the planned changes come to pass and the Newburgh facility closes.

John Bouck is the chief steward for the American Postal Workers Union. He worked in the Newburgh facility for 29 years until last September when USPS downsizing brought him to work in New Paltz.

“They’ve been trying to close [the Newburgh facility] for ten years, and we’re just not going to let them do it,” he said. “It makes no sense. There’s no way you can do what we do there cheaper anywhere else; it’s not going to save any money, and the town and the community need the jobs. If they close that plant, they have to relax the delivery standards for the mail.” He pointed out two businesses across the street from the post office. “Meaning if you mail a letter from that one to that one, it will take three days, whereas it goes overnight now.”

The rent on the building in Newburgh costs $1 per year. That’s no typo – it’s one dollar, said Bouck. “Anybody who tells you that closing it saves money, it’s not going to. We want to keep that plant open; it’s at the intersection of major highways, right on the runway of the airport; all the express mail for the entire area comes into that building.”

The closing of the Newburgh distribution center means that the mail now sent up to Albany for canceling will also have to undergo its final processing of separation by streets and addresses for delivery there. “To do our mail in Albany means that they’ll have to do it on the day shift, because they don’t have the room to do the mail otherwise,” said Bouck. “With their other responsibilities, that means it can’t get delivered in a timely manner.”

In the fiscal year 2014, the United States Postal Service (USPS) earned more than $1 billion in operating profit (and that’s been on the rise over the last few years). So what’s the problem? The reason can be traced to the lame duck Congress in 2006 that decreed the USPS must pre-fund future retiree health-care costs 75 years in advance over a ten-year period at a cost of $5.8 billion per year. No other public or private entity has that burden, and the responsibility it negates the actual profits that the postal service earns. “We’d have the money,” said Lawlor Roth, “if we didn’t have to pre-fund a retirement for 75 years into the future. And it doesn’t make sense to do that; we’ve never had any problem paying employees their retirement salary without having any pre-funded retirement.” New employees coming into the postal service are being paid at a much lower rate as “PSIs,” she said – postal support employees, i.e. assistants – “and they’re not paid enough to stick around for long. They’re not going to have people to retire in 75 years at the rate they’re going.”

Both Lawlor Roth and Bouck note the common perception that the USPS runs on tax dollars. “We don’t receive one penny in tax money,” said Bouck. “We make our money selling stamps and from whatever else we do.” And the unions have been cooperative, he said, taking a hit in Newburgh already where the job force that used to number 650 is now approximately 100.

The date for the National Day of Action rallies was problematic. Each of the three unions are asking their members to decide what they want to do. Some are saying to walk the line and get the media to cover the strike, which would be illegal. Their reason is to keep the option open of going on strike in the future if necessary. Others are saying to do nothing. Both Roth and Bouck have long memories and say that one of the Newburgh letter carriers was murdered less than two years ago by a postal employee. They do not think the Postal Service has the ability to protect its employees.

Author and multimedia journalist Alissa Quart will join the SUNY New Paltz faculty in spring 2015 as this year’s H. Ottaway Sr. Visiting Professor of Journalism. She will teach an upper-level journalism seminar called “Narrative Nonfiction in the Digital Age.” Quart is the author of three critically acclaimed non-fiction books: “Republic of Outsiders: The Power of Amateurs, Dreamers, and Rebels,” “Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers” and “Hothouse Kids: The Eilemima of the Gifted Child.” Her books have been published in 14 languages.

She is currently co-editor of Economic Hardship Reporting Project with Barbara Ehrenreich, a non-profit devoted to developing and supporting journalism about inequality. Her current multimedia project, “The End of the Middle,” is about America’s struggling middle class and is supported by the Magnum Foundation. Her first book of poetry, “Monetized,” will be published this year by Miami University Press.

Quart has written for The New York Times Sunday Review, The Atlantic, The Times Magazine, Elle, The Nation, London Review of Books (New York) and many other publications. In addition, she served as a contributing writer/editor at Columbia Journalism Review and Mother Jones, and was formerly a senior editor of the multimedia e-book publisher The Atavist. The transmedia work she co-conceived, wrote and produced for The Atavist, “The Last Clinic,” was nominated for an Emmy and a National Magazine Award in 2014.

Quart previously taught at the Columbia University School of Journalism and was a 2010 Nieman fellow at Harvard University.