

National Business Agent's Report

Mike Weir

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On October 31, 2008, the initial training of the district teams for the Interim Alternate Route Adjustment Process was conducted. It is currently up and running in Region 5's four states, with two teams in each district. I am very pleased with the composition of the district teams. Both the union and management members are very experienced at evaluating and adjusting routes as well as working together to ensure the integrity of a joint process such as this. Additionally, higher level management in three of the four districts is very supportive of the teams and is not interfering in the process. Unfortunately, as usual, the powers-that-be in Hawkeye do not quite grasp the concept of a joint process. We are monitoring them closely to keep their tendency to engage in unilateral action in violation of our agreements in check.

There is no question that mail volume has declined significantly over the past several months. I can see it on the workroom floors I have visited, and I am apprised of the decline being experienced by letter carriers I meet at trainings and branch meetings. As a result, the Postal Service is bleeding red ink to the tune of approximately 2.8 billion dollars in fiscal year 2008 and 5.1 billion dollars in the previous fiscal year. We cannot continue to sustain such losses in revenue and maintain our viability as a company. This fact has serious implications for all employees, including letter carriers. It was clear that we needed to take action immediately to deal with this economic crisis.

The NALC has always taken a pro-active approach to dealing with postal issues. We could, of course, bury our heads in the sand and hope the world goes away; but as the UAW and the Steelworkers, to name just two, have discovered, that is not a particularly effective strategy. Since the 2004 National Convention, we have been

working on an alternate method for evaluating and adjusting routes as a means of eliminating the stress and cost associated with full-blown inspections, creating a simpler, fairer method of establishing eight hour assignments and minimizing the confrontations on the workroom floor over workload issues. The MOU which was signed on October 22, 2008 establishes an expedited version of the process that the national parties have been testing over the past several months. We will continue to develop a process to be used in a stable mail volume environment, because we certainly hope to see improvement in the country's overall economic picture which would then translate into growth in mail volume and a return to a brighter financial future for the Postal Service. However, for the moment, we will be using this expedited process to address the current reality of a declining mail volume environment.

There are two very important points to remember about this process. First of all, it is a **joint** process. The union and management are equal partners throughout its implementation. The parties must take the time necessary to ensure that the integrity and credibility of the process is maintained. Secondly, it is a **data-driven** process. For it to work properly, we must have data for each route that is as accurate as possible. The district teams and the local teams each have roles and responsibilities toward ensuring that we achieve that goal. There are several steps that must be followed; and, at each step, there are opportunities for input to further refine the data. Additionally, the local parties are required to revisit the adjustments after they are put in place to ensure that the routes are as close to eight hours as possible.

This has been a learning experience for all of us as we move toward the finalization of adjustment packages by the deadline of January 16, 2009. As I stated at the outset, we have the right people in place to oversee this process and to ensure that it is implemented successfully. The local presidents have chosen qualified people for the

local teams as well; and we have been staying in contact with them to answer any questions and assist with any problems they may be experiencing. As with any route adjustment process, there will be routes that will have to be addressed after the fact, either through the review procedure or a special inspection. But overall, I believe this is a good process which will expeditiously address concerns regarding the impact of declining mail volumes on route workloads, significantly minimize the daily pivoting of letter carrier work and reduce reversion grievance activity. And let us not forget the additional benefits that letter carriers have acquired as a result of the MOU on the Assignment of City Delivery, which was signed in conjunction with the Interim Process MOU. The fact that the moratorium on contracting out letter carrier work has been extended for the life of the current National Agreement and that we now have an opportunity to pick up new deliveries that were, essentially, going to rural carriers for the past several years provides us with additional job security and strengthens our position as the dominant craft in the Postal Service.

On behalf of Danny, Nicole, Cheryl and myself, I want to extend our best wishes for a Happy Holiday Season and a Happy and Healthy New Year! Although we are currently in the midst of a serious recessionary cycle, I feel a sense of optimism about the future. With new leadership in Washington, DC, I believe that we will be able to rebuild our country so that its values and priorities once again reflect those of working men and women; and the American dream is restored as a reality that our children can truly aspire to achieve.

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