

National Business Agent's Report

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The promise of a new year generates resolutions for change and hope for a brighter future. This is especially true this year with the inauguration of President Barack Obama and the convening of a stronger, more worker-friendly Congress. Nonetheless, we must understand the reality of how difficult it will be and how much time may be involved in cleaning up the mess that President Bush has bequeathed to us. When you consider the many aspects of our current economic woes, including high unemployment and underemployment rates, the collapse of financial institutions, the meltdown in the housing market, the loss of so many good-paying, middle class jobs, and the stock market's roller coaster ride which is eating away at our savings and undermining our retirement security, it is clear that we are in uncharted waters. Certainly, during the first 100 days of his administration, President Obama will issue numerous executive orders to begin the process of addressing Bush's destructive legacy. However, a much more important component of turning things around will be the implementation of the stimulus package that he and his economic advisers are designing. NALC has already begun the process of ensuring that the Postal Service is included in any such package.

As I have stated in previous articles and as I am sure that letter carriers are all too aware of by this time, the USPS has taken, and continues to take, a significant hit in the current recessionary cycle. With declining mail volume and the subsequent loss in revenue, the Postal Service is struggling to remain a viable company in today's marketplace. Obviously, such a scenario poses a serious challenge for protecting letter carriers' jobs and for our ability to negotiate wage and benefits increases in the future. This underscores the importance of our involvement in the political and legislative arenas. While we are not requesting a bailout as so many other companies are, we are requesting that

Congress allow the Postal Service to use a portion of its own money, which it has been putting into an escrow account to pre-fund retirees' health benefits, to help alleviate its current financial obligations. Incidentally, no other company is involved in such a pre-funding scenario to the tune of 5.5 billion dollars per year! It is essential that we do whatever we can to weather the storm until we reach the projected recovery in 2010 which will, hopefully, include a resurgence in the Postal Service's business as well. As of this writing, Congress appears to be sympathetic to our concerns.

I recently returned from an Executive Council meeting in Washington, DC. Besides having the opportunity to discuss and debate, with the resident National Officers and my fellow NBAs, the many challenges facing us as letter carriers and union members, I am always impressed with the contributions of the support staff at NALC Headquarters. I wish that every member could have a similar opportunity to observe them in action. Their knowledge and expertise in the contractual, legal, economic, legislative and communications fields is second to none. Their commitment, ideas and insightful advice help us to shape the policies and direction this union takes on the many important issues of the day.

In particular, I want to commend the members of the legislative department for their exceptional work during the 2008 election cycle. Their training, encouragement, enthusiasm and vision made the NALC Field Plan so amazingly successful, and turned it into a model for other labor unions to emulate. I only wish I could have convinced more letter carriers to commit as much time and energy as the legislative leadership and RFCs to the effort to elect leaders who will be responsive to our needs and concerns. I also want to recognize the union activists who were released into the field in the Fall to work with the AFL-CIO on behalf of letter carriers and all working men and women. They made a big difference in the final, very positive outcome of the November elections. In Iowa:

State President Michael Birkett, Mark Fallis, Jim Beach, Tom Reisdorf, Michele Donnelly and Kevin Powers carried the load. In Missouri: Gerard Henke, Kevin Holmes, Ron Lewis, State President Kevin Boyer, Kevin Horan, Tony Jasper and Rex Kennedy led the charge. Although no one was released in Nebraska, State President Billy Ray Stevens, his CDLs and Omaha letter carriers made history by helping President-elect Obama capture one electoral vote in that state. Kansas State President Sherwood Applegate and other union activists worked very hard for change in that state as well.

The dates for the Regional Rap Session are fast approaching. It is scheduled for February 21 - 22 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in downtown St. Louis. The room rate is \$95.00 plus tax; and, as always, there is no registration fee. The cutoff for reservations at the special NALC room rate is January 20. The phone numbers are: 800-925-1395 / 314-621-8200. This year, Executive Vice-President Fred Rolando is the assigned national officer. Fred has been involved in a number of NALC initiatives directed at protecting letter carrier jobs and improving working conditions. We are fortunate to have him in attendance. Join us for our usual aggressive training schedule to assist local officers and stewards in dealing with issues of immediate and continuing concern for letter carriers.

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