

National Business Agent's Report

Mike Weir

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As I listened to President Barack Obama's inauguration speech, I was heartened by the striking contrast between its tone and content and that of the presidential speeches we have been dealing with over the past eight years. It is clear that we now have a president who understands the concerns and issues of working families and who respects the ideals and values embodied in our constitution. He is also quite capable of articulating his ideas and expectations. These things, in and of themselves, represent a refreshing change from the previous occupant of the White House. Over the first 100 days of President Obama's administration, I believe we will see a flurry of activity directed at implementing policies and passing legislation which reflect his positions. But as I have stated before, it will take a considerable period of time to repair the damage inflicted by policies based upon greed, fear, divisiveness and disenfranchisement. At least, we now have a new president and a more worker-friendly Congress who will actually begin the process of renewal; we will need to be patient and supportive of their efforts over the coming months and years.

January is, generally, the month for installations of local branch officers in Region 5. Danny, Nicole and I have been sharing the opportunity to attend branch meetings, interact with the members and install many new leaders in the local branches. It is truly a pleasure to see so many enthusiastic and dedicated members willing to take on the challenges with which we are faced today. And I appreciate the willingness of the more experienced officers and former officers to assist the newer leaders. With over 275 branches in the four-state region, it is essential that we have strong, committed leadership representing letter carriers at the local level. We have been fortunate to have such leadership over the years, and I am pleased to report that the tradition continues today.

It is a good thing too, since branches are being sorely tested throughout the region. Management is continuing their “fine” tradition of ignoring the contract as a way of making their numbers and following their marching orders. One district in particular has implemented a 5:30 PM delivery window and has, essentially, thrown Article 8 out the window as a result. In many offices, they are not even making a pretense of trying to abide by their obligations regarding the assignment of overtime. They claim that it is a customer service issue; however, this is the same district that forced business customers to accept poorer delivery service and does not really believe that the people we deliver mail to are our customers anyway. (Don't ask!) In other districts, due to the economic downturn and corresponding staffing issues, management has taken the attitude that they will do whatever they believe is necessary on a daily basis and deal with the grievances after the fact. Of course, again, they are not bothering to make any real effort to abide by the National Agreement even though there are, generally, other ways to accomplish their goals and stay within the four corners of the contract. Numerous grievances and requests for intervention are being generated as a result.

Obviously, this is causing a great deal of consternation out in the field. Currently, we are trying to convince managers at the district and area levels to step in and apply some common sense to these issues. Branch officers and stewards are struggling to get the time and documentation to pursue appropriate grievances, thereby generating additional grievances. In the meantime, letter carriers should be filling out 3996's and 1571's, as needed, and notifying management when you are unable to complete your assigned duties in eight hours. Follow instructions, but ask to see a shop steward when you feel that management is violating the contract. As with the rest of the country, we are certainly going through some difficult times in the Postal Service, and things could get worse before they get better. Nonetheless, we still have good jobs and benefits that are worth fighting for, and we should be proud of the service that we, as letter carriers, provide to our fellow citizens.

On behalf of the regional office, I want to extend my congratulations and best wishes to Keith Gentry who retired recently after fifteen years as president of Branch 343, St. Louis, MO. Keith served in numerous positions during his long and distinguished career as a letter carrier, union activist and branch officer. He worked tirelessly and effectively for his members, providing a level of commitment and competence that was second to none. Branch 343 has a tradition of producing leaders who are pro-active and innovative in their approach to representing letter carriers. Keith certainly fit that mold. Branch 343 is a stronger and more effective union for having had him at the helm. On a personal note, Keith was an important role model and mentor for me, and he remains a good friend. I wish him all the best for a long, happy and healthy retirement.

Plan to attend the Regional Rap Session at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in downtown St. Louis on February 21 - 22. Executive Vice-President Fred Rolando will join us for a lively and informative training seminar on a variety of issues of immediate and continuing concern for letter carriers. Hope to see you there!

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