

National Business Agent's Report

Mike Weir

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In late February, the annual Regional Rap Session was held in St. Louis, with 300 plus members attending from across the four-state region. Some of the topics discussed included the Interim Alternate Route Adjustment Process, Third-Bundles, COR, DOIS, TE issues, withholding, MDA and legislation. There was also stewards' training, and an entertaining as well as enlightening segment on OWCP. A separate break-out was conducted for the members in attendance from Iowa in order to address the escalating issues in the Hawkeye District. Our office has had ongoing discussions with the Postal Service concerning the policies put into place in that state. Since the Rap Session, there has been some progress there in dealing with the numerous, flagrant violations of the National Agreement. The NALC will continue to monitor what is happening in Iowa and all across the region. As I have stated before, the contract has not changed, nor do we have any intention of allowing management to simply ignore it because they think it is in their best interest to do so.

Danny, Nicole and I would like to thank Executive Vice-President Fred Rolando for attending this year's Rap Session. The members in Region 5 were fortunate to be able to hear Fred speak on so many topics currently affecting letter carriers. Additionally, they were very impressed with his knowledge of the contract and his willingness to address their issues and concerns. For some unknown reason, they also seemed to appreciate his "excessive" control of the microphone. Finally, we would like to thank Regional Trainer Rod Holub, who prepared and conducted the stewards' training and assisted us throughout the weekend.

On April 25th & 26th, the National Rap Session will be held in Las Vegas at the Luxor hotel. Saturday's workshops, conducted by NALC national officers and

Headquarters staff, will cover the impact of the Interim Route Adjustment agreement, the economic crisis and its effect on the Postal Service, NALC's community service agenda, and a range of contract administration issues. Sunday's Rap Session, presided over by President Young, will address the most important issues facing the NALC, including the postal crisis, health care reform and the Employee Free Choice Act. Branch presidents and others who plan to attend can refer to the March Postal Record for information on making reservations. I would urge branches to consider sending a representative to the National Rap Session. Participation will provide union leaders valuable information on the state of the Postal Service and the future course of the union in the current economic crisis.

On March 10th, the Employee Free Choice Act was formally introduced in the Senate and the House of Representatives. The NALC strongly supports this legislation, which will break down barriers that prevent workers from having a voice on their job, and make it easier for them to establish a union. This legislation would allow workers to form a union if a majority of them in a given workplace sign a card stating that is their preference. Currently, if a majority of employees sign cards, the employer can reject their decision and demand a secret-ballot election, supervised by the NLRB. During such elections, managers often employ delay tactics, intimidate workers and fire union organizers. **The Employee Free Choice Act would give the workers the choice of how to form a union, either through a secret ballot election after 30 percent sign union cards or through a majority 'card check' process.** Additionally, this legislation would require employers to bargain in good faith with the new union, by providing for mediation and binding arbitration for first contracts. It would also stiffen the penalties against companies that use illegal tactics in organizing campaigns. In other words, it would level the playing field between employers and employees, and give workers a fighting chance for a better life for themselves and their families.

Passage of the Employee Free Choice Act is an essential step in rebuilding the middle class; which would, as an additional benefit, help protect the wages and benefits of letter carriers as well. One major reason for the decline of the middle class over the past 25 years has been the decline in the labor movement and the percentage of workers who belong to unions. When unions were at their peak, workers made great gains. This established a benchmark for employees to use when negotiating contracts. That is no longer the case. Now, employers point to poorly-paid workers throughout the country as they try to extract concessions from their own employees. It is important to create good jobs with decent pay, health benefits and pensions, rather than simply create jobs. The Employee Free Choice Act is a critical piece of legislation toward achieving that goal. The legislation was introduced in the Senate (S. 560) with 40 co-sponsors and in the House (H.R. 1409) with 223 co-sponsors. As a senator, President Obama was a sponsor of the Act, and he has pledged to sign it into law as president.

Over the next few months, state conventions will be held across the region, beginning with the Nebraska State Convention – April 17th -19th in Omaha; the Kansas State Convention – May 1st - 2nd in Salina; the Iowa State Convention – May 3rd - 5th in Cedar Rapids; and the Missouri State Convention – June 5th -7th in Osage Beach. We look forward to visiting with everyone, discussing the issues and challenges that face us and sharing ideas on how best to deal with them, from a national as well as a local perspective.

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