

National Business Agent's Report
Mike Weir
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Over the course of the past year, I have written about the numerous challenges we face, the policies we have pursued in an effort to deal with them, the success stories we have realized and the future that we are trying to shape. In this, my final article of the year, I want to take a quick look back at the year that was and a quick look forward at the year that is to come.

2009 began on a hopeful note, with the election of a progressive president and a strong, labor-friendly Congress. NALC had worked very hard in 2008 to achieve that result. Still, we knew there was no magic cure for what ailed our country. The disastrous policies of the previous eight years had brought the economy crashing down around us, and working men and women were struggling to make ends meet. We needed to shift the focus from corporate greed to working families' needs. While I believe we have made a good start on that agenda, we clearly have a long way to go. Certainly, the depth of this recession is a contributing factor to the slowness of this recovery. And the fact that so many jobs have been lost in this downturn means that the eventual recovery will extend over a longer time frame. I think what I find most disappointing, if not downright disturbing, is the response of the minority party to the plight of the average citizen. It's one thing not to contribute any ideas to turn the country around; it's another to deliberately undermine efforts aimed at putting the economy and our country on sound footing again. The sad reality is that too many of our congresspersons and senators in Washington, DC would rather play political games for their own advancement than serve the best interests of the people they have sworn to represent. You would think that after eight years of applying that political philosophy to governing, people might actually consider trying a different approach. Apparently, you would be wrong.

Nonetheless, letter carriers have enjoyed some success in the legislative arena. First and foremost, was the passage of H. R. 22. We needed to provide the Postal Service with this short-term relief as part of a broader strategy to put the company on firmer, financial footing. We are already laying the groundwork

for new legislation in 2010 to make this relief permanent as well as to expand and grow the business so that we will remain a viable delivery service throughout the 21st century. Obviously, this would have a very positive impact on letter carrier jobs, wages and benefits. Additionally, Congress finally passed a measure to provide FERS employees with the opportunity to factor their sick leave into their annuity. It has been a long-standing goal of NALC to put FERS and CSRS employees on a level playing field with regard to this issue. As part of our effort to help rebuild the middle class, we are moving forward on healthcare legislation to finally address an issue that strikes at the heart of the financial and emotional security of working families. And, we will continue to press for passage of the Employee Free Choice Act next year. All working men and women deserve a legitimate opportunity to enjoy the wages and benefits that we do as union members.

NALC has responded pro-actively to the decline in mail volume that we have experienced, mainly as a result of the recession. We developed a joint process for evaluating and adjusting routes which has, for the most part, served both parties well. The fact that we incorporated a review process that takes into account volume changes throughout the year (whether they be up or down) has helped to ensure that the routes are adjusted as close to eight hours as possible. Safeguards regarding the use of COR have served to demystify and defang the components of this program. Certainly, we have had our issues with some managers and supervisors failing to comply with the spirit and letter of the agreement; but I believe that we have been able to minimize the impact of their actions by applying the provisions of that agreement. As always, we will work with management when we can to strengthen and preserve the Postal Service; and we will fight them when we must to ensure that letter carriers' contractual rights are protected. A case in point that comes readily to mind regarding the latter is the debacle associated with the implementation of FSS in the Mid-America District. The fact that management unilaterally determined the evaluation and adjustment of the routes in that instance does, however, further illustrate the point that the union's involvement is essential to achieving a successful result.

It has been a long, difficult and often frustrating year; and yet, I remain hopeful for the future. As I look forward to 2010 from the perspective of the holiday season, I also find myself looking back with gratitude for the efforts of so many union activists. It's important to have a vision for where you want to go and how you need to get there; but it's essential to have people who can make that vision become a reality. Region Five's cadre of branch, state and regional leaders, stewards, arbitration advocates, MIARAP specialists, local volunteers, etc. takes a backseat to no one in their dedication, expertise and ability to get the job done, no matter what the job is. They give unselfishly of their time to benefit their brothers and sisters. Any success that we have already achieved as well as the success I believe we will achieve in the coming year is directly attributable to their efforts. I feel privileged to serve with them, and honored to represent the letter carriers of our four-state region.

On behalf of Danny, Mike and Cheryl, I want to extend to you and your families our best wishes for a joyous holiday season, and a peaceful, happy, healthy and prosperous New Year!

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