

National Business Agent's Report
Mike Weir
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This month, management will present to Congress a report which asks our representatives to develop a new business model for the USPS and which outlines five alternative business models from which they might choose. None of the models have the best interests of letter carriers at heart nor will they, ultimately, result in a more vibrant Postal Service in the years ahead. Instead, this is simply more of management's "slash & burn" approach to addressing our financial issues: slash service by eliminating six-day delivery, burn bridges by treating our customers like second-class citizens and abandon the resources and infrastructure currently in place rather than more fully utilize it to expand service and generate new revenue. Thus far, the White House has reiterated its support for six-day delivery, and Congress does not seem to be particularly receptive to management's overtures. But we cannot be lulled into a false sense of security, and simply assume they will always take that position.

To be sure, NALC and USPS share some common ground on proposals such as abolishing or restructuring payments for future retiree health care benefits, diversifying product and service offerings, expanding upon partnerships with the private sector and providing more non-postal government services, but not in the context of the other provisions of these alternative business models. We have to ensure that we play a significant role in shaping the decisions that will, ultimately, recreate and reinvigorate the USPS in the delivery community. President Rolando already took the first step down that path in a major policy speech he delivered last November on the future of the Postal Service. The NBAs and the fifty State Chairs will continue that process in late March during a legislative training and lobbying trip in Washington, DC.

Success in the legislative and political arenas alone will not ensure our survival. We must demonstrate to Congress and the American people that we are working toward getting our own house in order. Programs like MIARAP and DRP, as difficult as they are to administer, are essential to our success in this arena. They represent efforts by the parties to get beyond our differences and work in a joint, cooperative manner toward a shared goal, one that we all should have an interest in achieving: protecting our jobs and preserving the Postal Service. Now, I have been in this business too long to take a Pollyanna approach to the labor/management relationship.

I am fully aware of how personalities can undermine the best of intentions, and how the reality at the local level generally lags behind the agreements between the parties at the national level. There is no easy fix to this disconnect; that is obvious. And the constant struggle to address this behavior is a source of extreme frustration and daily disappointment, to say the least. But the status quo is unacceptable. So, we will continue to utilize the joint processes we have in place to insist that rogue managers be held accountable for their actions, and to fight for a strong, fiscally-sound Postal Service where letter carriers are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve, and are valued and appreciated for their contributions to the company's resurgence. This is one battle we must win; for ourselves, for our families and for our future.

On another front, in light of recent setbacks in the political arena, it would be easy to react by turning our backs on the representatives we worked so hard to elect to represent our interests and who have, thus far, failed to do so effectively. However, cutting off one's nose to spite one's face is rarely an effective strategy. The right wing, anti-union forces in this country are very organized, well-financed, extremely good at staying on message and ruthless in the pursuit of their agenda. And that agenda does not include addressing the needs and concerns of working men and women. Clearly, we must be more forceful in putting current legislators and prospective candidates on notice that our support is contingent upon their enactment of progressive legislation once they are in office. And, just as clearly, we must remain involved and commit to work even harder this Fall to keep our enemies at bay and our hopes for a better future alive.

Nearly 300 NALC activists from throughout Region 5 came together in St. Louis last month for the annual Rap Session. They listened, learned and, in turn, taught us by sharing their experiences in the field. They brought their ideas and passion to the interactive discussions, assessing our contractual and legislative options given the current economic realities. No matter how insurmountable our issues may seem, I always emerge from these gatherings with a renewed feeling of optimism and a refocused sense of direction. We have a fine group of officers and stewards in the four states, and I am convinced that their dedicated efforts on behalf of letter carriers will have a significant impact on any success that we ultimately achieve.

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