

National Business Agent's Report

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At the Executive Council meeting last month, we discussed and debated numerous issues of importance to all of us as letter carriers and working men and women. One issue, in particular, which drives the confrontational atmosphere on the work room floor is the proper evaluation and adjustment of our routes. I am pleased to report that progress has been made on this front at the test sites under the auspices of the Alternate Route Evaluation Process Memorandum of Understanding. The National Task Force is now looking for additional pilot sites to further develop and refine a process which would be less stressful, less expensive and fairer to all parties concerned than current M-39 procedures. Of course, it is much too early to be breaking out the champagne. This is a difficult issue, and it will take a considerable period of time to achieve an acceptable resolution; but, at least, it is a step in the right direction.

As I am sure you are aware, the economy is not very healthy, and appears to be heading toward a recession. (If it isn't already there!) That fact has been wreaking havoc on two of NALC's main goals: strengthening the Postal Service and improving the financial well-being of the middle class. Given the extent of the downturn, many businesses are cutting back on their advertising and mailing budgets. As a result, mail volumes are dropping and the Postal Service is experiencing an extremely challenging economic and financial situation. In the private sector, workers are being laid off and/or having their wages and benefits cut. In fact, NALC has been unique in our ability to negotiate continuing increases in wages and benefits in the current recessionary cycle.

We will need to redouble our efforts on the legislative front if we hope to successfully weather the storm. DO NOT MAIL initiatives, which would siphon off even more volume, must be derailed; while VOTE BY MAIL legislation, which would raise revenue and empower the citizenry, must be encouraged. Strengthening the middle class requires passage of the Employee Free Choice Act. Results from recent polls show that 59% of American workers would join a union if given the opportunity. Passage of this law would provide them with that chance. This makes it even more imperative that we elect strong, worker-friendly majorities in Congress and a worker-friendly president to achieve those goals. Remember that, when you enter the polling booth in November.

Also, at the recent Council Meeting, Jim Williams, Jim Korolowicz and Ralph Goldstein provided the NBAs some insight into the philosophy and specific lesson plans associated with the Leadership Academy. I was very impressed with the quality of the program, and the character and caliber of the instructors. The Academy represents a sincere and amazingly successful effort to prepare the next generation for leadership roles in the NALC, at the local, state and national levels. Not only do the students learn the skills to handle grievances, OWCP issues, fiduciary responsibilities and other technical aspects of the job; but they are also exposed to less tangible qualities of leadership: perspective, compassion, commitment, understanding and integrity. I know, from personal experience, the impact that the Academy can have on its students. The graduates in Region 5 have already taken on additional responsibilities and leadership roles in their respective branches, to the benefit of their members. Plans are afoot to open up the application process for the 2009 Leadership Academy during this coming summer. One of the most important roles of any leader is to mentor the next generation, thereby ensuring the continuity of strong, effective representation in the years ahead. The Leadership Academy provides a unique opportunity to accomplish that goal. I strongly recommend that branches encourage their up and coming stewards and activists to apply.

In response to management's abdication of their responsibilities in this area, we have been conducting retirement seminars at the various conventions and training sessions throughout the region. These were so well received that we decided to take the "show" on the road, and give rank and file letter carriers, at various stages in their careers, an opportunity to attend and interact. I want to thank Branch 126 President Cyndi Kusk for hosting one such seminar for several branches in eastern Iowa. And I want to encourage any branch which would like to host such a training session for their members, or in conjunction with the members of other branches as well, to contact the regional office. Retirement planning is a complex issue, under the best of circumstances. The least any employer can do for a 30+year employee is afford them face-to-face counseling, to help them understand their options and give them some peace of mind in the decision-making process. Apparently, the Postal Service no longer feels such an approach is necessary. Given all the problems we are experiencing with Shared Services, in this and every other arena, we do! Give us a call.

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