



Hey America— We're in this together

I hate to say this, but too many Americans have become selfish, greedy, what's-it-in-for-me kind of people. Willing to take but not to give.

Do they care about the guy next door who's lost his job? Or the woman around the block suffering from a debilitating disease? Or the people down the street whose house is "under water"?

Not a chance. And don't bother these people about the enormous economic, environmental and social problems.

Pay taxes for the benefits they receive? Are you kidding? Government is the enemy—the government that defends our shores, builds and maintains our roads, bridges and rail system, educates our children and works to keep our air and waterways clean.

The late Sen. Russell Long had it about right years ago when he captured the views of those who want to enjoy the benefits of society without paying for them: "Don't tax me. Don't tax thee. Tax that fellow behind the tree."

Of course, today, anti-tax zealots like Grover Norquist wouldn't want to tax the fellow behind the tree either.

These people are free-loaders. They don't see it this way, of course. For them, it's all about "liberty" and "freedom"—the freedom to do what they want, when they want, regardless of the consequences.

I'm not talking about NALC members, nor the large numbers of Americans who play by the rules and don't expect others to do the heavy lifting for them.

No, I am talking about those letter carriers and other workers who receive the benefits provided by union representation but who are unwilling to pay dues for that representation. I'm talking about those who can afford health insurance but don't buy it because they're convinced they'll never get sick and, after all, there are emergency rooms that will treat them for free. And I'm talking about those wealthy individuals who fight tooth and nail against any and all tax increases that might require them to pay a little more to assist the less fortunate.

Let's take a look at what's going on:

- Anti-worker politicians are promoting so-called "right to work" laws that forbid requiring workers to pay union dues for the representation unions are required to provide. The goal? Weaken if not eliminate unions, thus leaving workers at the mercy of unbridled managers, as well as ensuring that workers have no voice in the political and legislative arena.

- The public, poisoned by the constant drumbeat from right-wing media and conservative politicians, now opposes the "individual mandate" in the Affordable Care Act overwhelmingly, even though the mandate was originally a *conservative* idea hatched by the conservative Heritage Foundation. *Today*, conservatives argue that the individual mandate they once supported is an infringement on freedom—the freedom of individuals not to have health insurance even though the rest of us are required to pick up their tab when they become ill or get injured.
- House Republicans just passed a budget that would shred the nation's already frayed social safety net while continuing to allow corporations and the richest Americans to avoid paying their fair share and actually *lowering* the amount of taxes they would pay.

The uncomfortable reality is that this nation's infrastructure is collapsing; our health care system costs way too much and produces results that compare poorly with those of most developed nations; and our educational system fails at all levels to produce young Americans able to compete with their peers in today's global economy.

The reasons for these failures? A political culture hijacked by the self-proclaimed champions of "freedom" and "liberty" who, by rejecting the idea that Americans should work together to solve common problems, have systematically dismantled government's ability to solve the nation's problems.

Let me put this in terms closer to the values of letter carriers who belong to the NALC. These free-loaders oppose the basic principles of the American labor movement—that an injury to one is an injury to all and that strength comes through solidarity.

The answer? There's no easy one, but let's begin telling those who would divide us that looking out for others while paying our fair share for the benefits we receive are acts of solidarity—and is the American way.

It's a sad commentary that in a rich nation like ours, the NALC Food Drive is still a necessity. Thank you to those who are participating this year. And let's act this fall to elect candidates who stand by working Americans as well as by those who cannot fend for themselves. ☒