

A new year committed to safety, security and service



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So often, the thing that makes something special and good is inextricably tied to negative consequences that must be confronted.

Think about the Internet. It has made life immeasurably easier and richer in many ways for all of us, but it has also destroyed lots of jobs and altered the lives of millions of Americans like us—and not just letter carriers; ask the travel agents, the newsprint producers and the full-commission stock brokers who no longer have jobs.

The same dynamic can be seen with what we offer the country: a universal mail and package delivery service, six days a week. The

ubiquitous presence of letter carriers in our country's neighborhoods that makes it possible for us to help the elderly, look after children, and perform frequent acts of heroism also exposes us to accidents, assaults, robberies and sometimes worse. It's the flip side of the universal service coin and it must be confronted.

Tragic events like the murder of a city carrier assistant in Cheverly, MD near Washington, DC (see story, page 4), and the recent wave of assaults on letter carriers in Chicago have highlighted this problem. Indeed, last year there were 151 assaults and 67 robberies targeting letter carriers in the United States. Most of the attacks occurred in broad daylight, but we are concerned that the routine delivery of mail outside traditional work hours or in the dark may increase the risks. Such delivery is becoming more common for a number of reasons.

First, the impact of plant consolidations, post office realignments and other operational changes is delaying times for when carriers hit the streets and contributes to later delivery times. Second, the Postal Service's business is changing as the needs of businesses and households evolve. The explosion of e-commerce means more work for letter carriers, which is vitally important to us at a time when traditional First Class letter mail volume is declining. But the other side of booming e-commerce is growing demand for same-day and next-day service—which also increases the percentage of package deliveries outside of traditional work hours. Third, growing poverty and inequality in America is eating away at social norms that once protected letter carriers from assault in even the most crime-ridden neighborhoods. It was once taboo to rob a letter carrier—not only because

folks respected the job and its place in our communities, but also because potential criminals knew that committing a crime against a federal employee carried dire consequences. Sadly, even this social norm has lost its power in some communities in our country.

In December, the NALC and the Postal Service initiated discussions on a national effort to address the safety of letter carriers and service to customers in light of these changing dynamics. We are urgently working to develop a program that will allow us to address safety and service concerns that arise in any part of the country, day or night. This also will allow us to take steps to protect carriers as the Postal Service evolves to meet the changing needs of our customers. The discussions involve NALC and Postal Service officials responsible for labor relations, delivery operations, and safety and health, and they are geared toward creating a structure and process for solving service and safety problems at the grassroots level, wherever they arise.

NALC will seek to use the full range of tools available to us to improve service and eliminate unsafe working conditions at any time (day or night), including changes to starting times and staffing levels, transportation reforms, route structure adjustments, revised route evaluation procedures, safety training and equipment upgrades. We recognize that while there are common causes for some of the problems we seek to address, many of the service and safety issues we face stem from local factors that require local solutions. For that reason, we aim to fully integrate NALC branch leaders and their management counterparts into the process of fixing problems as they arise. Letter carriers know best how to make our work safe and we intend to empower letter carriers in this initiative.

Even as we focus on physically protecting letter carriers at the grassroots level, we must not take our eye off the ball when it comes to congressional threats to the Postal Service and our job security. In December, budget negotiators reached an agreement to partially replace the across-the-board sequestration cuts enacted in 2011 with an alternative package of budget cuts and revenue increases to avert another government shutdown.

House GOP proposals to eliminate Saturday delivery and to raise pension contributions for all current and future federal employees (including all active city carriers) by 5.5 percent were rejected in the agreement after NALC and its allies mobilized our members and the public to resist. But we did not emerge totally unscathed (see story, page 6). We will have to be equally vigilant as Congress takes up postal reform and appropriations bills this year.

I wish you all a happy new year. But to make it truly happy, we will need to work together to ensure safe and secure jobs for all of America's hardworking letter carriers.