

Hope comes with a changing of the guard in Washington



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A new year, a new Congress and a new postmaster general offer hope for a fresh start in 2015. For that, we can all be thankful.

We have come through one of the most difficult periods in the history of the Postal Service. We are finally emerging from the long and strong aftershocks of the Great Recession of 2007-2009 and, thanks to an e-commerce boom and a strengthening market for advertising mail, we can clearly see a brighter future emerging.

In December, our package volume was 18 percent higher than the year before, gasoline prices plummeted and economic growth surged to its highest level since 1999—all good signs for the mailing industry and the economy in general.

We have also survived an almost unprecedented period of destructive leadership on postal matters. The chairmanship of Rep. Darrell Issa, who used his post as leader of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee (OGR) to relentlessly advance legislation to degrade and dismantle the Postal Service, has come to an end. So has the tenure of Patrick Donahoe as postmaster general.

Issa has thankfully departed the OGR Committee in the new Congress. The new chairman is Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-UT), who appears committed to working with Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-MD), the ranking Democrat on the committee, in a cooperative and bipartisan manner. Indeed, Chaffetz and Cummings did something last year that really impressed me—and a lot of other folks in Washington: Over several days, they visited each others' congressional districts—a rural district in Utah and an urban district in Baltimore—to learn more about their respective constituencies.

As a starting point, their visits suggest an initial commitment to seek solutions that make sense for everybody. That is a commitment every member of Congress should make—after all, reconciling divergent interests is what democracy is all about. And it's the only way to end the partisan gridlock and dysfunction in Washington—and to achieve sensible postal reform.

NALC has had a constructive relationship with Rep. Chaffetz in the past, and Rep. Cummings has been a staunch advocate for letter carriers and the USPS. We look forward to working with both of them—and, in the Senate, Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI), the

new chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, and ranking member Tom Carper (D-DE)—to strengthen the Postal Service for the future. In our relations with every member of Congress, we pledge to continue to be problem-solvers dedicated to postal innovation and growth.

NALC will do everything in its power to build a smart and constructive partnership with Postmaster General Megan Brennan when she takes over this month. Stretching back over decades to the days of Employee Involvement, to the creation of the Alternative Dispute Resolution Program and the Intervention Process, and to the development of various joint route adjustment procedures that helped USPS survive the global economic crisis, our union has a proven record of forward-looking, constructive engagement.

At the same time, we have staunchly resisted postal management when its actions have threatened to harm letter carriers or endanger the future viability of the Postal Service. Sadly, that was the case for much of the recently ended tenure of Postmaster General Donahoe, whose unholy alliance with Issa and whose blinkered vision of the future posed a greater threat to the USPS than the Internet or the Great Recession ever did.

Indeed, the only sour note so far in the new year came from the now former PMG. In what can only be described as a classless and petulant exit, Donahoe held a press conference at the National Press Club in January during which he denounced everybody he could think of—the postal unions, the major mailers, their trade associations, and Congress. Our crimes: failing to recognize his genius and unwillingness to follow him over the cliff with his disastrous approach to postal reform.

At the Press Club, Donahoe accused the postal unions of being selfish and short-sighted for opposing the most destructive aspects of his strategic plan. Most preposterously, he accused us of having no long-term vision for the Postal Service. Given that NALC has painstakingly built a broad coalition of unions, management associations and major mailer organizations to advance a consensus plan for major postal reform—and that the PMG was the only stakeholder absent from our coalition despite repeated invitations to join us—this claim is almost laughable. Just let me say that I wish the former PMG a happy retirement and that I am committed to turning the page with the new postmaster general.

Together with the new leadership in Congress and with other industry stakeholders, I am confident that we can advance reform to ensure a future of innovation and growth for the United States Postal Service, without degrading the quality of our service. That's what letter carriers want, and that's what the American people deserve.