

A new understanding of heroism



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Our members, our union and our country are being tested this summer by three overlapping crises.

First, of course, is COVID-19. Although many states are beginning to ease the economic lockdowns put in place to slow the spread of the virus, the public health crisis is far from over—the number of new infections is now rising in 21 states, while the prospect of effective treatments and a vaccine remains months away at best. More than 115,000 Americans have died from it, and the number could rise substantially.

Second, we face the worst economic crisis in nearly 100 years. With more than 20 million Americans out of work and

a coming wave of bankruptcies, the economic situation is likely to get worse before it gets better. USPS has not needed taxpayer funding for four decades, but it will need it now, because of the falling mail volume caused by the pandemic-related economic shutdown.

Third, there is a crisis of injustice revealed not only by an ingrained culture of racism, but also by the uneven impacts of both the pandemic and the recession on our brothers and sisters of color. The resulting wave of protests by a multiracial coalition of people of all ages must be harnessed to move the country toward positive change—and we must be part of that change.

I am hopeful, for a very specific reason, that we will overcome these overlapping challenges: the everyday heroism of America's working people. We've known all along that ordinary letter carriers routinely do extraordinary things to help their customers in the neighborhoods they serve while delivering the mail. But since March, letter carriers and other postal employees—along with nurses, grocery store workers, bus drivers, police, EMTs and others—have shown themselves to be heroes of a different kind. Showing up to do essential work in the face of uncertainty and danger is also a kind of heroism, which makes it possible for Americans to shelter in place or work from home for months at a time to slow the spread of the virus.

It is this newly appreciated heroism that gives the country hope that we can overcome these challenges—and that is rallying the entire country behind the Postal Service. An astonishing nine in 10 Americans, regardless of political party, view the USPS favorably, according to a recent Pew Research poll. A recent Harris poll ranking 100 major U.S. companies rated the Postal Service as the nation's "most essential"

company. As a union, we must harness this public support to preserve and protect the Postal Service.

We have created a campaign to lobby Congress for emergency financial assistance to the Postal Service to make up for the loss in mail volume caused by the crisis. As part of this campaign, we commissioned a bipartisan public opinion poll that showed overwhelming support for such federal assistance. We're running advertisements on television and social media in targeted states with key senators. The poll and the ads can be viewed at heroesdelivering.com, which we are using to recruit citizen-allies to complement our members' efforts from NALC's website and social media platforms.

In mid-March, the House of Representatives passed the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions Act—the appropriately named HEROES Act. It would provide a \$25 billion appropriation to the Postal Service and eliminate restrictions on our \$10 billion COVID-19 line of credit while funneling hundreds of billions of dollars to cash-strapped state and local governments. The goal is to protect the jobs of essential workers, who are crucial for overcoming the current crisis.

There are at least two factors that could complicate efforts to obtain COVID-19-related financial assistance for the Postal Service. First, some Republicans on our oversight committees doubt the Postal Service's need for assistance because package volume and revenue have surged with the crisis. But that surge is likely to be temporary, while the huge loss of mail volume and revenue due to the deep recession will persist for a longer time. Second, amid the crisis, we are experiencing a leadership transition in the Postal Service. Not only do we have a new postmaster general, but by the time you read this, we also will likely have a new deputy postmaster general and two new members of the Board of Governors. Like us, they too will be tested this summer.

To facilitate the nation's recovery, Congress must build confidence in the mailing industry and the country that the Postal Service is here to stay—by supporting it with funding during the crisis. Visit the NALC website to see what you can do. Send your family and friends who want to help to heroesdelivering.com. If we can mobilize the overwhelming goodwill of the American people, I am confident that the everyday heroism of our members will be rewarded.

Meanwhile, the NALC will continue to primarily focus on protecting the health and safety of letter carriers as the country begins the long process of returning to normal. We cannot let our guard down. As more people return to work and public life, our potential exposure to the virus will only increase. We must be more careful than ever. Please stay safe.