

# Seeing past the gloom to a brighter tomorrow



**W**hen times are tough, as they are now, it's hard to see anything but the dark clouds ahead. Despite a sputtering recovery on Wall Street—sparked by a massive taxpayer bailout—the U.S. economy is still in a real mess. Unemployment has doubled in the past 16 months and could hit 10 or 11 percent before the end of the year. Wages and work hours are falling and the number of home foreclosures has spiked into the millions. In this business environment, short-term survival—getting through the next week, the next quarter or the next year—becomes paramount.

With the recession playing havoc with the Postal Service, we, too, are in survival mode. But the Postal Service and the NALC must do more than hunker down and just fight to survive in the short run. We must also do all we can to imagine, and then to realize, a stronger, better Postal Service for the 21st century once this crisis passes. As the new president of the NALC, I will make that the union's chief mission in the years to come, a mission that will require the solidarity and commitment of every city letter carrier in America.

**Unfortunately, I am afraid the Postal Service is succumbing to short-term panic by rushing toward a decision to embrace five-day delivery as the solution to its woes.** Indeed, the Postal Service recently revealed that it is ready to support the biggest change in its operations in more than 50 years—the elimination of Saturday delivery—based on the flimsiest “evidence.” An academic study that claims USPS would save \$3.5 billion per year by going to five-day delivery, which the Postal Regulatory Commission rejected as unsound in December, has been dusted off to convince Congress to drop the mandate to provide six-day delivery.

Even worse, the Postal Service appears ready to abandon the one clear advantage it has over private companies—delivery service on Saturday—in order to cut costs in the short run. Does that make any sense when the fastest-growing part of the delivery industry in the decades to come is likely to be

in small parcels and goods purchased through online sales?

Downsizing the Postal Service, making it less valuable to businesses that operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, is a short-sighted reaction. Cutting costs and improving efficiency, as we are doing through the Modified Interim Alternate Route Adjustment Process in response to declining mail volume, makes sense.

Permanently cutting service to your customers and “right-sizing” the Postal Service to meet depression-level demand is penny wise and pound foolish. Companies like eBay and Netflix, prescription drug managers like Caremark and the full range of American magazine publishers depend on Saturday delivery. Turning our backs on them one day a week threatens to push business away permanently. Giving up Saturday delivery is surrender.

**NALC is prepared to be a partner with the Postal Service to find solutions to this crisis, both in the short term and over the long haul.** We must work together on Capitol Hill for legislative relief—starting with H.R. 22, free of any amendments to eliminate six-day delivery, and continuing with a fundamental reform of the grossly unfair decisions made during the Bush administration on pre-funding retiree health benefits. We must seek win-win agreements at the bargaining table to boost revenues and cut costs intelligently. And we must begin a serious process for developing a new business model based on our mastery of the “last mile” of delivery.

Our union will extend a hand of cooperation to management and will seek allies in the postal industry for this important work. But we also will fight any proposal that risks the long-term viability of the Postal Service. I sincerely hope that cooperation wins out over conflict. NALC has proven over the years that it is a forward-looking and trusted stakeholder in our industry. I am ready, and I believe the membership of the NALC is ready, to continue that tradition.

If we stay together, I am confident that we can emerge from these dark times stronger, better and more prosperous than ever. ☒