

## Message from President Stutts: We Will Deliver for the 2020 Election (And Beyond)

### **Let There Be No Doubt: We Will Deliver for the 2020 Election (And Beyond)**

It is an understatement to say that this year has brought unprecedented challenges for rural carriers, as individuals and as a craft. Even in “normal times”, the transition to a new Postmaster General can cause anxiety and uncertainty as we learn about and try to work with different leadership to advance and protect rural carriers’ rights and ensure the future of the Postal Service. Add to that the COVID-19 pandemic, an election year in an extremely contentious political environment, and the fact that our National Agreement expires next year, and it is difficult to imagine a more perfect storm. Despite the chaos and difficulties, I am optimistic about our craft’s ability to step up to and meet these challenges.

Given the quickly changing environment and the onslaught of information (and misinformation) circulating, I want to address several issues:

### **Delivering During the 2020 Election**

Over the past few months, many have questioned the Postal Service’s ability to ensure that election ballots get delivered and counted timely – something rural carriers and their brothers and sisters in the other crafts have done for decades. Some of the doubt stems from those who make baseless claims about the security of election mail, clearly ignoring the fact that Postal employees work for the most trusted government agency in the country. There are those who might question the new PMG, Louis DeJoy’s, political motivations because of his connections to the President and Postal contractors as well as recent reports about his campaign fundraising. Some of the doubt about the Postal Service’s ability to deliver during November stems from the expected significant increase in mail-in voting during the pandemic, COVID-related staffing shortages, and perceived service disruptions that have been in the news.

While I understand these concerns, everything that I know about the dedication of rural carriers and our history of delivering high volumes of mail even during crises and what I have learned from my discussions with the Postal Service, convinces me that we will get the job done. Your NRLCA Board has been in frequent contact with the Postal

Service about the pandemic, the election, operational changes, and other issues, and we are closely monitoring what is happening out in the field. The NRLCA is also participating in a joint task force with the Postal Service and other unions. The group is addressing COVID-related and other concerns that could affect mail delivery during the election, and we will keep you informed of important developments. Thus far, everything we see leaves us confident that the Postal Service has more than enough capacity to continue to move ballots, parcels, medications, and other mail quickly and efficiently in November.

Make no mistake, we have our share of concerns. The timing of many of the PMG's initiatives – now on hold until after the November elections – was unfortunate and easily fed into a narrative that suggested we could not get the job done. But we were encouraged to hear PMG DeJoy say, in no uncertain terms, that delivering ballots on time is a “sacred duty” and the Postal Service's “number one priority.” He urged the public to “vote early” and gave firm assurances that ballots received on time will be properly processed and delivered. And PMG DeJoy himself said he planned to vote by mail. A recent Washington Post – University of Maryland poll indicated that 6 in 10 registered voters say they want to vote before election day compared to 4 in 10 who cast ballots early in 2016.

As the NRLCA, we are in a unique position 1) to keep PMG DeJoy true to his public commitments and 2) to continue our heroic efforts carry out the Postal Service's mission and ensure its success while serving our routes every day. That is what keeps me driven and hopeful during these difficult times.

### **Operational Changes**

During the PMG's first few months in office, the Postal Service has undergone a number of highly publicized operational changes. Some “changes” are continuations of policies that were already in place. For example, the number of blue collection boxes have already been declining in numbers for many years. Other changes, such as eliminating sorting machines which are used at less than 50% of their available run time to make room for parcel equipment, appear to be based upon economic decisions without any noticeable effect on delivery. The NRLCA had been notified of many of these changes early this year prior to Mr. DeJoy assuming the role of PMG on June 15, 2020. Indeed,

many of these changes have been ongoing for years. (See the Postal Service's statement about these issues at: <https://about.usps.com/newsroom/statements/082120-just-the-facts-six-things-to-know-about-the-usps.htm>). Nonetheless, we are pleased that the PMG has agreed to delay these practices until after the election.

Keep in mind, that some of the recent changes have directly benefited our craft. We have applauded some of the restructuring of operating sectors and changes in top management which we anticipate will improve our ability to work with the Postal Service.

### **Delay of mail**

Let there be no misunderstanding, there is nothing that upsets the NRLCA and rural carriers any more than the delay of mail. Rural carriers take pride and ownership of their routes and the customers that they serve. Most rural carriers have a personal connection with their customers, and they are like family. Rural carriers want to report to work, take out all available mail and service their customers. However, for years rural carriers have shared their concerns with the National Board about continued late arriving mail to their offices. This has caused carriers excessive waiting time and management's answer has been to have the carriers report later and later. It is still a common occurrence for mail to arrive after the carrier leaves for the street causing excessive second trips, and some of this mail is not delivered until the next day.

Carriers have long been pleading with the National Board to get the Postal Service to better "manage" the mail so they can timely leave the office. The problem is two-fold: shortage of personnel and mismanagement! Then comes the pandemic further adding to the problem. The stay home order in most all states caused a huge increase in online shopping and a 60% to 80% increase in parcels for the Postal Service. This increase in parcels along with the many COVID-19-related absences have made it harder to move the mail resulting in delays. These problems persist and they are causing many of our leave replacements to be over worked. Unfortunately, as a result, too many leave replacements are resigning.

### **Congressional Action and The Future of the Postal Service**

I watched PMG DeJoy's recent Senate and House testimony carefully and critically, but with an open mind. The testimony was enlightening and, frankly, confirmed much of

what he has conveyed to the NRLCA during our conversations. He made it very clear that he understands and values the public mission of the Postal Service, including six-day delivery and universal service which he explicitly stated were “strengths,” not limitations, of the Postal Service. At the same time, he clearly recognizes the agency’s financial challenges and sees, as we do, that those challenges cannot be addressed without Congress’ help to eliminate the retiree health insurance pre-funding mandate, integrate retiree health care with Medicare, acquire loans and other funds to compensate for pandemic-related expenses and new vehicles, and to provide other legislative support.

One thing is clear: to ensure the Postal Service can continue to serve its vital functions, we need Congress and the administration to do more. Our leaders must pass a stimulus bill, such as the HEROES Act and the Postal Service Emergency Assistance Act that provides direct financial relief to the Postal Service during this pandemic. The Administration’s payroll tax holiday is not an answer as it only delays tax payments that workers will have to pay back later. Thankfully, I have been informed that, unlike other government employees, Postal employees will not be forced to delay their tax payments.

I have had three meetings with PMG DeJoy. Two of these meetings were face to face. During one of these meetings, PMG DeJoy explained to me the problem he saw with the length of time it took to get mail from the plants to the offices. He understands the inefficiencies caused by excessive waiting time and delays in carriers leaving for their routes. He shared with me that he wanted to try some things to help with this problem. PMG DeJoy also listened to my concerns, including rampant mismanagement (managers not trained to do their jobs) and the shortage of leave replacements, caused primarily by the ways in which they are treated. I was also asked by PMG DeJoy to participate on a task force to help ensure the timely handling of mail-in ballots.

I know that there are a lot of political issues going on with the appointment of PMG DeJoy. However, we cannot be too quick to judge. He has only been in his job for 87 days and I know that he is not responsible for many of the issues taking place today.

The Union is optimistic, but we will not let our guard down. We will continue to demand transparency and accountability from the Postal Service and to push for the legislative

and other political support we need. We will ensure that the Postal Service lives up to its contractual obligations to the rural craft and continues to fight for terms and conditions of employment that keep us safe, allow us to do our jobs effectively, and recognize the value we provide to the Postal Service as essential workers and heroes – during pandemics, elections, and every day.

Thank you for all you do!

Please be safe!

Ronnie Stutts

President, NRLCA

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