

#YATCR Podcast Ep. 12 Transcript

BRIAN RENFROE, NALC EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

You are listening to the NALC “You Are The Current Resident” podcast. I’m Brian Renfro, Executive Vice President. This is your podcast for Wednesday, May 13th.

We’ll start today’s podcast by going to NALC President Fredric Rolando for an audio version of his May 13th statement to NALC members. Here is NALC President Fredric Rolando.

FREDRIC ROLANDO, NALC PRESIDENT:

Good afternoon! This is President Fredric Rolando. Today is May 13th, 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have wide-ranging impacts on every aspect of our lives. The way we now live, work, purchase goods and services, and communicate with each other has changed drastically. The ongoing crisis has disrupted businesses both large and small, some of which may never recover. While postal employees are essential workers, vital to the American public and economy, and still working each day, the Postal Service too has been hit hard by this pandemic.

As letter carriers know, the conversation about Postal Service finances is nothing new. Unfortunately, this pandemic continues to cripple the economy, resulting in sharp declines in letter mail volume for the Postal Service. It currently projects that it will exhaust its cash on hand by the end of September if Congress and the White House fail to intervene.

On May 1, North Star Opinion Research and Hart Research Associates, leading Republican and Democratic public opinion firms, released the findings of a national poll commissioned by the NALC regarding the continued operation and funding of the U.S. Postal Service during this pandemic. Unsurprisingly, the results of the poll show overwhelming bipartisan support for the Postal Service with 94 percent of all registered voters polled saying mail and package service is important to them. In addition, 95 percent of registered voters polled said receiving by mail official government recommendations, supplies, medications, and test kits related to COVID-19 is important to them during this crisis.

While those results are no surprise given the Postal Service’s popularity, when respondents were asked whether they would favor or oppose appropriating funds for the Postal Service to maintain operations through the coronavirus crisis in the next round of financial relief legislation, 92 percent of voters said they would favor this move. Additionally, 78% of voters prefer federal funding over increasing parcel rates, and 70% prefer direct funding over government loans.

The poll results clearly show that the American public overwhelmingly supports the direct appropriation of funds for the Postal Service during this pandemic. NALC will continue to work with Congress and the

White House to stabilize the agency in the next stimulus package so that the Postal Service can continue to serve the needs of 160 million households every day.

Yesterday, a new coronavirus aid package was released by House Democrats that includes \$25 billion in direct funding to the Postal Service. The bill would also repeal restrictions on a \$10 billion line of credit that was authorized in a previous stimulus package. There is also a hazard pay provision that would include postal employees. Certain members of the Senate and the administration will likely resist many of the provisions of the package once the negotiations for a final bill begin. Letter carriers should continue contacting their senators to urge support for funding in the next stimulus package. Let your senators know how important the Postal Service is to the American public, and that funding is necessary to replace lost revenue from declining letter volume related to the pandemic, and for COVID-19 related expenses. For more information on how to take action, and to view the results of our bipartisan poll, please visit the "Government Affairs" page on the NALC website.

On May 6, the U.S. Postal Service Board of Governors announced the selection of Louis DeJoy to serve as the next postmaster general, succeeding current PMG Megan Brennan. PMG Brennan announced her intent to resign back in October 2019 but remained in her role while the search for a new PMG continued. Mr. DeJoy, is expected to begin serving in his new role effective June 15th. He is the first PMG in over 20 years to not rise through the ranks of Postal Service. Mr DeJoy is currently President of LDJ Global Strategies, a real estate development, private equity, and consulting company based in Greensboro. He also currently serves as the lead fundraiser for the Republican National Convention. Prior to that, he spent over 30 years as a very successful CEO in the logistics field.

On May 7, I congratulated Louis DeJoy on his appointment as the 75th postmaster general. I say again, the National Association of Letter Carriers is committed to working in good faith with him to build a relationship based on mutual trust and a shared vision for the future of the Postal Service. This shared vision should embrace a strategy to grow as a public institution that values its employees and that works with its unions to promote high-quality service, safety, efficiency and a workplace culture of mutual respect. I look forward to seeing whether his agenda is indeed consistent with this vision.

The selection of the new PMG followed the unexpected resignation of Board of Governors Vice-Chairman David Williams on April 30. It is reported that Governor Williams resigned in protest over the Treasury Department's inappropriate meddling in the management of the Postal Service. We had recently written to the Board members urging them to resist such meddling, and I ask the same of the new postmaster general. Our letter noted that 'It is the role of a democratically elected Congress to set postal policy in this country, and it is the role of the Board and the PRC to implement that policy with the managerial and regulatory discretion provided by law. The Treasury Department has no authority to re-write the law or to impose its policy preferences on the Postal Service – or on the country'. Keeping politics out of the Postal Service and maintaining its independence is central to its success—this is one of the reasons that over 90 percent of all Americans, from both parties and from rural and urban areas alike, support the Postal Service.

In my statement on April 3, 2020, I reported on the possibility of our interest arbitration hearings for a new collective bargaining agreement being delayed due to the pandemic. Neutral arbitrator Dennis Nolan has now provided sufficient hearing dates for September through November to replace the previously scheduled dates in May, June, and July. There continue to be major issues at stake, as we still have many unresolved differences regarding economic, operational and workplace issues. Our collective bargaining goals have not changed. While we continue discussions with the Postal Service, we are also continuing to prepare for arbitration to achieve those goals. Our current collective-bargaining agreement remains in full force pending final resolution of the parties' dispute.

Last month I also reported that the NALC Executive Council was doing its due diligence to explore our options in the event we would be unable to hold our National Convention as scheduled August 17-21. At the direction of the Executive Council, we have notified the convention center, hotels, and various vendors of our decision to cancel the convention. Unfortunately, the state government of Hawaii could not give us any assurance that travel or gatherings with the number of delegates we would have had attending would be allowed in August. Please see the NALC website for information regarding cancellation of hotels and travel reservations. At this point in time, we will continue to monitor the effects of the pandemic and then consider the available options for scheduling the convention in the future. In March, as a result of the inability to social distance during route counts and inspections, USPS agreed with NALC to instruct its field representatives to temporarily halt route inspections until further notice. After continued negotiations with NALC, later in April USPS further notified the Area offices that all route inspections scheduled for the rest of the spring would be cancelled. This includes refraining from conducting any PS-Forms 3999, PS-Forms 1838C, and special route inspections. Additionally, the Postal Service has now also agreed that any pending implementation of previous route adjustments would not take place until at least June 6.

Since Handbook M-39 also states that June, July, August, and December are to be excluded from any route counts and inspections, there should be no route inspections until at least September. Letter carriers who are subjected to counts and inspections in contradiction to these policies should immediately inform their local union representatives, who in turn without delay should inform their national business agent.

Currently, in Ft. Lauderdale, Tampa, Dallas, and Greenwood, SC, the Postal Service is testing the use of various types of materials and styles to be used as face coverings during the hotter months. Such styles being tested include various bandanna type masks, neck gaiters, and even cooling masks. While we don't yet have the final data from the tests, initial results indicate that the carriers liked three of the five styles tested, two of which were the neck gaiter style, and the other being a bandana style. The Postal Service will be ordering the selected styles.

Recently, in certain New York City and New Jersey ZIP Codes, COVID-19 sample test kits began being mailed through the Postal Service as part of a limited research study being conducted by the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, working in conjunction with Rutgers University. Such test kits are

being supplied to 4,000 targeted recipients to be tested for COVID-19. A Mandatory Stand-up Talk regarding the tests should have been given in the offices where these mailings are taking place. The kits are mailed daily to 100-200 select volunteer recipients from the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City. The volunteers then self-administer the test and return the sample through the mail to either the Icahn School of Medicine or Rutgers University in Brunswick, NJ for testing. Each test kit contains explicit mailing instructions for the test recipients to follow to ensure the safety of individuals handling the return samples. Letter carriers can get more information or clarification about these mailings from their supervisors. If you are unable to get information or clarification from your supervisor, please contact your local union representative, your National Business Agent, or email NALC headquarters at COVID19@nalc.org.

As the pandemic persists, we continue to discuss with the Postal Service potential new temporary policies and procedures to protect our members, other postal employees, and our customers. One such policy being discussed involves taking the temperature of employees when reporting to work. The Postal Service will soon begin proof of concept testing in a few sites. What this means is that they will be testing whether the equipment they bought works, so we can discuss the feasibility of how and where such a system would be used. We are in the process of discussing the relevant policies and procedures that would be followed should the system be implemented in selected sites. The test will involve taking the temperatures of employees on a voluntary basis as they enter the workplace each day. They will test doing this inside, outside, and even drive-by.

There will be four proof of concept test sites likely beginning next week: Merrifield, Virginia P&DC, Falls Church Virginia Carrier Annex, Fairfax Virginia Main Office, and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma P&DC. The test will run for two weeks. Having your temperature taken is voluntary, taken with a camera or scanner from a distance, and no health data will be collected or maintained. During the two-week test, if an employee has a temperature of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, they will be so informed in private, and then sent home and paid either Emergency Paid Sick Leave or administrative leave until the fever subsides.

This week, we also began discussions with the Postal Service regarding making test kits available for employees to be tested at worksites. Several options and possibilities are being explored, and the relevant policies and procedures associated with such testing are being discussed.

Also, this week, we will be discussing renewal of the many COVID-19 related memorandums of understanding that we have negotiated with the Postal Service during the last eight weeks. As always, information will be posted on the NALC website.

Today, some 5000 employees are under quarantine from the virus. Over 12,000 previously quarantined employees have been cleared and returned to work. About 900 of the currently quarantined employees have tested positive for the virus, and another 500 are presumed to be positive. Another 1000 employees who tested positive in the past have recovered and returned to work. Of all these numbers, about one-third are letter carriers. Sadly, 60 employees have passed away from the virus, including 14 city letter carriers.

Daily I see depictions of letter carriers as heroes; watch guards of society working diligently to serve the citizens of the United States – your customers. It's true, you are all heroes, and I, along with the other NALC officers and employees, remain ever so proud to be working for you. Thank you for all that you do, please stay safe. God bless each of you and your families.

BRIAN RENFROE, NALC EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

That was President Fredric Rolando, with the audio version of his May 13th statement to NALC members. I want to thank all of our members that have taken advantage of the action center that was created on our website at www.NALC.org to give you an easy way to contact your senators or your members of Congress to encourage them to support the financial relief that the Postal Service needs in the next round of stimulus legislation.

Right now, the House of Representatives has introduced a bill that includes much of what we need that would really do the trick, so to speak, if we were to get this legislation passed to get us through the effects of this pandemic. That said, there's a long way to go. We expect passage of that bill in the House of Representatives. But it remains to be seen how this will work on the Senate side.

But in the meantime, again, I thank those of you that have taken advantage of that opportunity. We've had, I believe, over 100,000 contacts now. So that's excellent that so many of our members, as you always do, have taken advantage of that opportunity.

I encourage you if you've already done that, to maybe focus your time and energy on encouraging other members that maybe haven't taken that step--your friends and brothers and sisters that you work with and ask them to do the same thing.

It's really easy. Just go to www.NALC.org, and you'll see across the scrolling slider banner at the top. It'll be the first thing you see. Click that link and it'll take you just a couple of minutes there to enter some information that you'll know off the top of your head and be able to say in that communication, the more of us they hear from, the louder our voices.

One question that's come up is, is what if our friends and family or others want to do the same thing? Do we have a way for them to do that? We will have one very soon. We will not have a way through our NALC website because that tool is designed just for our members to use.

But in part of our campaign and overall strategy of educating and influencing members of Congress of both parties, as well as the White House to include the financial relief that we need, a website has been created that is www.heroesdelivering.com.

And the purpose of this website is to be a public place where any American can go and read about the information that's important about the Postal Service. And very soon, probably by this weekend,

sometime, there will be a similar action center there that will allow them to contact their senators and their members of Congress and encourage them to also support it. So once that's up and going well through this form of communication with you on this podcast and our other forms of communication, be sure that you know that it's up and ready and you could encourage your friends and family to take advantage of that.

As always, we love to hear from you. So we appreciate any feedback that you give us or questions or comments. You can contact us by email at social@nalc.org. You can also send us questions on social media. If you do that, please use the hashtag #YATCRpod. And we'll be happy on each podcast to choose a few of those that we think could be of interest to NALC members and answer those questions again on social media. Please follow us on Twitter @NALC_National, on Instagram @lettercarriers, on Facebook @nalc.national. We have a YouTube channel called "The Postal Record." And of course, the NALC Web site as anything and everything you want to know about your job and our union.

Well, thanks once again for listening. And I know I've said this on this podcast before, but it's worth repeating every time I get the opportunity to talk to you is the work that all letter carriers are doing every day is admirable. And you're all heroes. And you hear that while you're out on your route. And the country is, I think, really started to take notice that at the best time on a wide scale, and that's a lot of what this website's about heroes delivering is, is educating the public as well as our members of Congress on that fact.

So until next time. Thanks again for listening. Please stay safe.
