

Good Cop/Bad Cop— right here in the USPS



William H. Young

You can't pick up a newspaper these days or turn on the news without finding another report of law enforcement abuse. Unauthorized surveillance, illegal searches, suspension of civil liberties, beatings—all the way from wiretaps to water-boarding. Call that the Bad Cop side.

Of course, in today's world, our personal security is on the line and we need effective law enforcement. Whether it's the neighborhood cop or a super-spook, we need that "Thin Blue Line" to protect us from the worst that human nature can deliver. That's the Good Cop side.

What has this got to do with the Postal Service, and letter carriers, and the NALC?

Plenty. We have our own Good Cop/Bad Cop syndrome—and increasingly the Bad Cop is in the driver's seat. And NALC is not going to sit still for it.

Now, we are not stupid. With 800,000 USPS employees, there are bound to be some bad apples. Even among our own 225,000 city letter carriers there will be some who do not deserve to wear the uniform.

Because of those rare bad apples, all postal employees have been subjected to surveillance throughout the history of the Postal Service—peepholes and catwalks, cameras hidden in bathrooms and supervisors hiding behind trees. You name it, we've seen it. Sometimes professional; all too often, Keystone Kops-like; occasionally outrageous and completely unacceptable.

In that last category we have entered a new era, the era of the "Office of Inspector General," which has taken over from the Postal Inspectors—and from the Postal Service itself—key elements of employee monitoring, investigations and law enforcement.

How is the OIG doing?

In the past year, in just three cities—Houston, Texas, and Battle Creek and Grand Rapids, Michigan—OIG agents brought charges that resulted in more than 100 removals. In virtually every case, the improperly suspended carriers were returned to work with full back pay, including lost overtime. The total cost to the rate-payers was

well over \$1 million, plus hundreds of thousands of dollars for replacement labor during the wrongful suspensions and the high cost of litigating the removals through the grievance-arbitration process.

In Houston, a 35-year carrier, less than a year from retirement, was placed on emergency suspension, and then removed, in a case that the arbitrator ultimately stated was "so lacking in substance that it bordered on an unconscionable act." The arbitrator not only reinstated the employee with full back pay, but also awarded an extra half-day's pay for each day he was off the clock for a four-month period, noting "there is not a remedy that can give back to the grievant what he lost." (He "lost his home, alienated his family due to the mental strain he endured, had his phone cut off....")

In addition to bungling "investigations" of letter carriers, the OIG also has appointed itself a "health oversight agency" and is going after personal, legally protected health information without the consent or authorization of carriers. The OIG secretly contacts doctors for the information and tells them to keep their letter carrier patients in the dark about the loss of privacy. Outrageous!

I have directed NALC's attorneys to pursue this matter relentlessly through litigation.

But trashing letter carriers, trampling on their rights, snooping into their medical records, and generally acting like an out-of-control Bad Cop isn't enough for the Inspector General. He thinks he's a management guru, too, testifying before Congress in favor of contracting out, an "incentive-based letter carrier performance system" (read: "if we like you, we pay you"), and "a slow, *de facto* privatization of the Postal Service."

Who knows what's next: The color of our uniforms? The design—or price—of stamps?

But remember, Inspectors General come and they go. The NALC stays because its job is to make sure that the Bad Cops do not get away with their excesses—that they stay within their proper jurisdiction, and when they step out of bounds, that the USPS pays for it. Every nickel. Every dime. Every million dollars. ☒