

A Holiday Message from GVP Pantoja



December 23, 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

This holiday season is ending a year unlike any other. 2020 began with a prosperous transportation industry. National rail negotiations were underway, the first joint collective bargaining agreements with American Airlines were wrapping up, and negotiations with several airlines were expected to yield tremendous benefits to tens of thousand of IAM members.

COVID-19, however, had a different year planned for us. The global pandemic brought our industry to a screeching halt. The airborne virus' deadly nature kept people from traveling by air or rail. The economic impact crushed the industries that rely on freight rail to transport their goods. Jobs were lost, carriers like ExpressJet Airlines stopped operating and no one knew how long it would last.

Through an intense grassroots lobbying effort, the IAM and other AFL-CIO unions were able to secure unprecedented job protections for airline workers as part of the CARES Act. Enhanced and expanded unemployment benefits were won for railroad workers. Labor earned another win this week as Congress agreed to extensions of these programs for our air and rail members.

On March 16, 2020 I wrote, "I cannot promise you there won't

be some short-term pain ahead." Pain is what we expected, and pain is what we got.

Although our legislative efforts and discussions with carriers prevented an untold number of furloughs, many of our members felt the pain first hand. The Transportation Department has lost more than 10,000 members since the beginning of 2020. Those are 10,000 families that have had to survive without expected income and the benefits of their IAM contract. They are 10,000 families that are having a very difficult holiday season.

Add to that the incomprehensible pain of losing someone you love to COVID. Or the helpless feeling of being prevented from visiting or celebrating milestones with our families and friends. There is no question that 2020 was one of the hardest years of our lives, as individuals, as a union, as an industry and as a planet.

Just as I told you in March that there would be pain, I am now telling you we have turned the corner and things are getting brighter. As a result of our lobbying and bargaining efforts, some airlines are recalling employees. Others have indicated they will not have furloughs, and one, Alaska, is even hiring new employees off the street. The Machinists will not rest until every furloughed IAM member is given the option to return to work.

Two vaccines have been approved in the United States, and distribution has begun. The Machinists Union is working to make essential Transportation workers a high priority for vaccination. The recovery will be slow, but the good news is that it has already begun. We will get our industry and our lives back stronger than before.

We all have restrictions that make this holiday season different, yet we will still celebrate. We will celebrate that we are still here, we will remember those we lost, and we will prepare for the year ahead. I wish you and your family health,

safety and happiness during this holiday season and throughout the New Year.

Finally, I must recognize all the IAM members who are working this holiday season amid the difficulties this pandemic presents to ensure millions of travelers and goods reach their families and destinations safely. You are the heroes that are not always seen, and never appreciated enough. You are the reason I have hope, and why I am proud to fight beside you for a better future for us all.

In solidarity,

Sito Pantoja
General Vice President