

The overtime coin



**Mack I.
Julion**

If there is one thing that I have learned in my 25 years in the Postal Service, there are two sides to the overtime coin. For the past couple of years, especially right after the COVID-19 pandemic began, we have seen the worst side of the coin.

The Postal Service is now so understaffed that it is mandating that carriers every day work overtime that they otherwise would not work. Many are seeking medical documentation to avoid the constant mandatory overtime. Although Article 8 is supposed to have safeguards to limit the amount of overtime that a carrier is required to work, there is

really no way around it when you are as poorly staffed as the Postal Service is. That is why staffing is one of the primary issues that we are seeking to fix through negotiations, but resolving this latest crisis will require that the Postal Service step up to the plate financially.

As a practical business matter, staffing must be high on the priority list for the Postal Service if we are going to be successful in this very competitive market. While I have always believed that the Postal Service would rather be understaffed than properly staffed, the ability to hire and retain will hinge on properly compensating the letter carrier workforce.

Recently, I spoke with some members about what happens when their office is properly staffed, and there is actually a letter carrier on every assignment. This may be the ideal situation and bring welcome relief for those who just want to do “eight and skate,” but it can be traumatic for those who have become accustomed to the extra pay and the lifestyle the overtime pay provides. Although there are many carriers who complain about being overworked and burned out, there is another segment who are committed to *that life* of making all the money they can, while they can. These opposites generally have totally different views on life in the Postal Service!

As union reps, our attention usually is focused on carriers who are being mandated to work the overtime that they do not want. These members have accepted the job as advertised and want to go home after they complete their eight-hour assignment. A carrier shouldn't

be required to have an appointment or reason to go home, other than it is the end of their workday. And we shouldn't have to get medical documentation to state the obvious: It's in the best interest of our health to limit our workday to eight hours! An overburdened workforce can lead to more on-the-job injuries and a contentious and hostile work environment. (Sound familiar?) This has been the case for most post offices across the country during this latest staffing crisis.

“Carriers who have based their spending and lifestyle on the overtime pay will find themselves in a financial hole.”

Most will point to the mandatory overtime as being the source of the problem, but I believe that the overtime is in fact a symptom of the failure to properly staff our offices.

Those who have been in the Service for an extended period have seen this movie play out before. The abundance of overtime will disappear. When that happens, we will see the other side of the overtime coin. Carriers who have based their spending and lifestyle on the overtime pay will find themselves in a financial hole. The overtime they have come to depend on will no longer be there.

When I used to speak with new carriers at orientation or upon their conversion to career, I always warned them about how misleading overtime pay can be. If you look at the pay chart, I am sure you will find that there is no “base” salary over \$100,000. At the same time, there are many carriers who have already exceeded their *total* listed level of pay for the year. That in itself is not a bad thing, but it becomes problematic if you create your bills based on the overtime.

We all agree that city carriers deserve a higher wage across the board and that is what the NALC is fighting for; but overtime pay should be treated like “gravy” in addition to your base salary. This requires discipline, but we must learn to live within our means. The overtime pay will come and go. The important thing is to remember that it is not reliable, or the main entrée. It's just gravy. And with reports of letter carriers making more than double their listed salary, that is a *whole lot of gravy!* Just as we have seen in the past, the Postal Service will be properly staffed again because it is in the best interest of the company to do so, but this time it's going to cost them to get there!