

Members who deliver deserve contract credit



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Last summer, when we met for our 65th Biennial Convention, a banner above the stage at the Las Vegas Convention Center read, "NALC—A Union That Delivers." That simple slogan celebrated a great tradition but also posed a challenge to the union's leaders and activists. Given the ambitious goals we set for ourselves that week—a trifecta that included passing postal reform, taking back the Congress for working people and getting a new labor contract—measuring up to that slogan was never going to be easy. One year later, I can proudly say that we have done precisely that. We have, in fact, measured up.

Back in November 2006, we hoped to achieve all three of our goals in the same month. Two out of three was not bad—postal reform passed and political change came to Washington. But the contract did not materialize. It took a little longer than we wanted, but we can now say we completed the Las Vegas Trifecta. On July 12, NALC reached a tentative agreement with the Postal Service on a new five-year contract. As with postal reform and the 2006 elections, all credit goes to the union's thousands of dedicated activists.

Details of the new National Agreement are presented in this issue of *The Postal Record*. I will not repeat them here, but I do want to note a few highlights. It provides the highest wage increases since the 1984-87 National Agreement. Moreover, the deal not only provides five general wage hikes and preserves our twice-a-year COLAs, but it also offers every city letter carrier in America personal protection against the threat of contracting out and eliminates the use of low-wage casuals in the city carrier craft.

That's right—no carrier will see his or her job outsourced and every city letter carrier will be part of our bargaining unit. The addition of new TEs in place of casuals could also ease the chronic understaffing that plagues parts of the country.

Beyond that, the proposed contract presents a way for the union and the Postal Service to work together to ensure the success of the Postal Service in the Internet Age. It gives us a chance to smoothly implement flats automation by resolving several nagging national-level disputes on favorable terms and provides a mechanism to jointly develop a more harmonious and efficient way to evaluate routes.

In our union, the membership gets to decide whether to accept or reject the terms of any contract its leaders negotiate in a one-member, one-vote ratification ballot. I believe we have reached an historic contract that deserves your support. Indeed, the NALC Executive Council has unanimously endorsed the agreement and urges you to ratify it. Once all the contractual language is finalized and a copy of the agreement (including all the accompanying MOUs) is printed for every active member, we will send it out for a ratification vote. In the meantime, it is important to pause now to consider how we got to this point and what challenges we still face.

In an open-shop union that is 92 percent organized, it is not difficult to find the source of our strength. It is the membership. But the reason we achieved our goals at the bargaining table may be less evident. When bargaining collapsed last December in the face of top management's refusal to budge on the issue of contracting out, we adopted a two-pronged strategy. We began preparing for interest arbitration and initiated a drive on Capitol Hill to alert Congress to the threat of Contract Delivery Service. Several hundred letter carriers sacrificed time at home with their families to personally lobby Congress this spring and summer and thousands of e-Activists repeatedly answered my calls to contact their representatives in Washington to urge support for a legislative ban on contracting out. Hundreds of other carriers showed up at

picket lines to protest Postal Service plans to outsource delivery in their hometowns.

Congress responded. More than half of the House of Representatives endorsed Rep. Albio Sires' resolution against delivery outsourcing and a third of the membership of the Senate co-sponsored Sen. Tom Harkin's bill to prohibit new contracting out. Thanks to all these efforts, the Postal Service was forced back to the bargaining table and it began to cancel plans for CDS routes in many places around the country (see pages 12-17).

Even the most committed ideologues at the Postal Service's L'Enfant Plaza headquarters had to take notice of the support we generated from Congress. Fearing a legislative loss on the issue, the Postal Service decided it was better to negotiate over subcontracting. We signed two Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) regarding subcontracting to supplement Article 32 in the National Agreement. One prohibits any contracting out in more than 3,000 delivery installations (covering 90,000 routes) where only city carriers work, while protecting all existing city carrier work from outsourcing in any other installation in the country. The other establishes a Joint Committee on Subcontracting, in which representatives of the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association will also be invited to participate, to address the issue as it affects new deliveries. These MOUs permitted us to conclude an agreement worthy of the men and women who deliver the nation's mail securely and with pride.

Most of the credit for the National Agreement described in the pages that follow rightfully goes to the thousands of letter carriers (e-Activists and grass roots lobbyists) who moved Congress to pay attention to the debate over contracting out. The best way to thank them is to join them. Go to the NALC web site and sign up to become an e-Activist, and do your part to help us elect even more friends to Congress by giving \$5 each pay period to COLCPE through payroll deductions.

In the labor movement, as in life, no victory is final. Although we won protection against contracting out for our existing jobs over the next five years, the threat has not been completely eliminated. The Postal Service would not agree to per-

manently forgo outsourcing of new deliveries, especially in newly developing areas of the country. In the MOU establishing the Joint Committee, it did agree to a six-month moratorium on any new contracting out in any office where city carriers work. This applies to offices where some 70,000 city letter carriers work alongside rural letter carriers. During the moratorium, the Joint Committee will debate the issues and attempt to reach an understanding on outsourcing. Frankly, we hope to use this six-month period to convince the Postal Service to abandon CDS altogether. But it is too early to bury the threat of outsourcing. We have a lot of work ahead of us.

That brings me back to Congress. On July 19, I testified at a hearing on contracting out held by the House Subcommittee on the Federal Workforce, the Postal Service and the District of Columbia (see page 18). Subcommittee Chairman Danny Davis called the hearing in large part because of the attention we brought to the issue of Contract Delivery Service.

At the hearing, I updated the Congress on our progress at the bargaining table and I thanked all those House members who supported H. Res. 282, the non-binding resolution calling for the Postal Service to discontinue the contracting out of mail delivery. Although I reiterated my firm belief that contracting out is a public policy issue as well as a bargaining issue, I suggested that Congress pause before it moved ahead with any legislation containing a binding prohibition on contracting out. I asked them to give our Joint Committee a chance to work. It is my fervent hope that we can reach a sensible solution with the Postal Service. But I assured Congress that we would be back if the Postal Service did not deal with the issue in good faith.

Everything that has happened in recent weeks has once again reminded me of the value of democracy and the power and genius of collective bargaining. But mostly it has reminded me what a privilege it is to be a member of the National Association of Letter Carriers. Let us never take these things for granted and let us never forget that only a union with a dedicated and energetic membership can be "a union that delivers." ☒