

At NALC rap session, President Renfroe updates state and branch leaders on:

- Contract negotiations
- Crimes against carriers
- Heat safety
- Improving representation
- Legislation and politics
- New initiatives



NALC President
Brian L. Renfroe

More than 1,000 letter carrier activists representing branches across the United States gathered in New Orleans to take part in NALC's 2023 National Conference. The *NALC Constitution* calls for the union to hold a national conference in non-convention, odd-numbered years, with the date set by the Executive Council.

NALC President Brian L. Renfroe called the meeting—commonly called a “rap session”—to order at 8 a.m. on Sunday, Nov. 19, after a rousing performance by an authentic New Orleans “second line” jazz band. Renfroe invited Branch 124 member **Charlie Bradford** to sing the national anthem. Branch 124 member **Troy Joseph** led the Pledge of Allegiance followed by Branch 124's **Harold John**, who delivered the invocation.

Renfroe then introduced the members of the NALC Executive Council before recognizing former national President Fredric Rolando and other retired national officers, regional administrative assistants, Headquarters letter carrier and professional staff, full-time advocates, legislative and political organizers (LPOs), regional grievance assistants, regional office assistants and regional workers' compensation assistants.

The president then thanked the leaders in the room and the members around the country who have reached out to him during his treatment for alcoholism this past spring. “It was almost overwhelming, the amount of support and encouragement that I received from our members,” he said. He encouraged the people in the room who might need help to seek it; or if they knew of someone who needed help, to offer it. “I share this for one primary reason—no matter who or where you are, or what your responsibilities may be, help is available. If hearing this encourages

a single individual to reach out and receive the help they need, it's worth me sharing,” he said.

Contract negotiations

Renfroe then moved on to the topic of contract negotiations. “That is always our top priority,” he said. “It's at the top of mind for me every morning, night and minute in between.”

He explained that NALC is working on dual tracks, finalizing preparations for interest arbitration even as it continues to engage at the table with the Postal Service for a negotiated agreement.

“We have been hard at work for some time in preparation for the possibility of us reaching the interest arbitration process, and we are not completely finished with that preparation, but we have a very strong case put together. And should that be where we ultimately end up, we feel very good about the case that we can put on,” Renfroe said.

The president said the parties are in the process of selecting a neutral arbitrator to chair the panel, and will schedule hearing dates shortly after that.

“We will proceed as if we're going there, but at the same time, we are going to continue to negotiate,” he said. “I think both sides feel like it is well worth our time and our energy to continue to try to work toward an agreement.”

Renfroe said that while the parties have made progress toward reaching an agreement on the economic terms of a potential agreement, a gap remains between what the Postal Service is willing to pay and what the union believes would constitute a fair agreement that rewards NALC members for their value and contributions to the Postal Service's success.

“We started with a pretty large gap,” he said. “We are going to keep working



The NALC Executive Council was on stage for the rap session.

at it, and hopefully we can finally get to the point of agreement.”

Another topic of negotiation is the status of the non-career workforce. Renfroe said that if the non-career workforce does exist in the next contract, it needs to change considerably, particularly in pay. “There is a scenario where we could reach a tentative agreement that included the continuance of a non-career workforce in some form, if they are willing to pay all letter carriers what we believe we deserve,” he said. “Of course, there’s also a scenario where we reach a tentative agreement that does not include a non-career workforce.”

If the parties go to arbitration, NALC will present an official economic proposal that the union would support in its interest arbitration case and seek to achieve in the process, and if so, the president outlined what he was fairly certain would be in that proposal: “A single pay table, as we just talked about. We would go into the process proposing to eliminate the non-career category. We would propose that our cost-of-living adjustments be restored to 100 percent, starting at Step A and all the way through the process. And then we would, of course, propose that we receive significant annual general increases.”

Enough is enough

Renfroe then talked about the increase in robberies and assaults targeting letter carriers, which have risen exponentially over the past three years, with more than 2,000 such assaults in that period. Of those, only 14 percent have resulted in an arrest and federal prosecution. “Unfortunately, there is no simple, quick solution to this,” he said. “This is something that’s going to take time. But we are beginning to make progress.”

The Postal Service has made both public and private commitments to replace all of the Arrow Locks in the field and has tested a number of electronic solutions to devalue the Arrow Keys, which have been a primary target of thieves.

Renfroe said that increasing federal prosecution rates is another important component. The Postal Service is funding about a dozen prosecutors in U.S. attorneys’ offices to spend a majority of their time prosecuting these crimes. But more is needed, and that is why NALC has been holding “Enough is enough” rallies.

The rallies boost media awareness of the issue and generate robust news coverage, which in turn prioritizes the issue for residents and U.S. attorneys, thereby helping raise prosecution rates. (For more on the rallies, see page 10.)

In addition to the rallies, NALC has been working with members of Congress on crafting and introducing legislation to help combat the issue. Renfroe said that the bill would be NALC’s primary legislative priority and

that he will call for a day of action to quickly grow the support of co-sponsors and public awareness.

“For the longest time, most of us in this room carried mail and nobody ever messed with us,” he said. “There was a thought, if you mess with a letter carrier, that’s a federal employee, you’re going to jail. We have to make that a reality. That’s ultimately what deters these crimes.”

Heat safety

The president next addressed heat safety, which has resulted in letter carrier deaths. He said that the Postal Service has acknowledged the widespread problem with getting area and district managers to hold the mandatory heat training.

Along those lines, he said, “We are going to continue to engage them to ensure this training looks a whole lot different for 2024 by the end of or by April 1 of next year.”

A major part of the issue is that the United States does not have a heat safety



A New Orleans “second line” jazz band kicks off the rap session.



More than 1,000 branch and state leaders attend the rap session.

standard for workers. The Biden administration is working on one, which the NALC has vowed to help with. “We will continue to use every avenue we possibly can until we get to the point where they have a heat-illness prevention program that includes all the elements that are accepted by experts in this field, to protect people that are working from the dangers of excessive heat,” he said.

Improving representation, the Delivering for America Plan

Renfroe told attendees how the union is trying to improve representation for the branches, mostly small, that are not fully functioning—not active in representing their members—by working to merge those branches with nearby functional branches that can improve the representation for the members. He said that 113 of these branches have been merged with other branches, resulting in improved representation for those members.



Texarkana, TX Branch 569 President Sanjera Johnson asks a question during the rap session.

On the Postal Service’s 10-year plan, the union is remaining engaged with the Postal Service in order to maintain a seat at the table and offer feedback, but also to enforce compliance with the National Agreement as more letter carriers start delivering from Sorting and Delivery Centers (S&DCs). He also warned members to not listen to local managers talking about routes that will be moved to a future S&DC. “If you’re going to be impacted by one of these in any way, you will hear well in advance from your regional office and from us at Headquarters to prepare for that,” he said.

Politics and legislation

President Renfroe outlined NALC’s legislative and political agenda, starting with the union’s efforts to educate the Biden administration on the need for implementation of the “Segal” pension valuation method for CSRS. Convincing the White House to issue an executive action to institute the private-sector pension valuations would save the Postal Service billions of dollars annually.

In Congress, NALC continues to add support for the Social Security Fairness Act (H.R. 82), the bill that would repeal the Windfall Elimination Provision and the Government Pension Offset. Another piece of legislation is the Federal Retirement Fairness Act (H.R. 5995), the bill that would allow former non-career employees—including CCAs, TEs and casuals, all the way back to Dec. 31, 1988—to make deposit (or buy back) their non-career time and have it credited for retirement. A little-known fact, Renfroe said, is that 64 percent of active letter carriers would be affected

by this legislation, which shows why it remains a legislative priority.

However, President Renfroe said that members needed to be realistic about the chances of passage in Washington. He pointed to the many years it took of building support for postal reform through Congress after Congress, so that when a certain election went a certain way, it was possible to finally get the legislation enacted.

He thanked the letter carriers in the crowd who wore black T-shirts showing that they had upped their contributions to the Letter Carrier Political Fund (LCPF). He said that while he took pride in the fact that the union had reached the 12 percent threshold for members giving to NALC’s political action committee, he knows that NALC can do better.

“I just do not believe that 88 percent of our members have consciously chosen not to participate in the Letter Carrier Political Fund,” he said.

He said that when members are informed and then asked to join LCPF and the process is made easy, the union sees significant improvement. He said that the LPOs have been making the first part easier, especially when aided by branch leaders. On the second part, problems with PostalEASE and LiteBlue have made it more difficult, but NALC is working on a solution to make it much quicker and easier.

Unfortunately, the president said that there was not time to outline the process for Medicare integration under the Postal Service Reform Act, but that the “You Are the Current Resident” podcast posted on the same day had many details for members. The podcast

By making a contribution to the Letter Carrier Political Fund, you are doing so voluntarily with the understanding that your contribution is not a condition of membership in the National Association of Letter Carriers or of employment by the Postal Service, nor is it part of union dues. You have a right to refuse to contribute without any reprisal. Any guideline amounts are merely suggestions, and you may contribute more or less than the guidelines suggest and the union will not favor or disadvantage you by reason of the amount of your contribution or your decision not to contribute. The Letter Carrier Political Fund will use the money it receives to contribute to candidates for federal office and undertake other political spending as permitted by law. Your selection shall remain in full force and effect until canceled. Contributions to the Letter Carrier Political Fund are not deductible for federal income tax purposes. Federal law prohibits the Letter Carrier Political Fund from soliciting contributions from individuals who are not NALC members, executive and administrative staff or their families. Any contribution received from such an individual will be refunded to that contributor. Federal law requires us to use our best efforts to collect and report the name, mailing address, name of employer and occupation of individuals whose contributions exceed \$200 in a calendar year.



NALC national officers and letter carrier staff lead informative trainings over the course of the day.

is available on nalc.org, Spotify, iTunes and other places you listen to podcasts.

New initiatives

To end the speech portion of the meeting, Renfroe outlined four new initiatives NALC is working on:

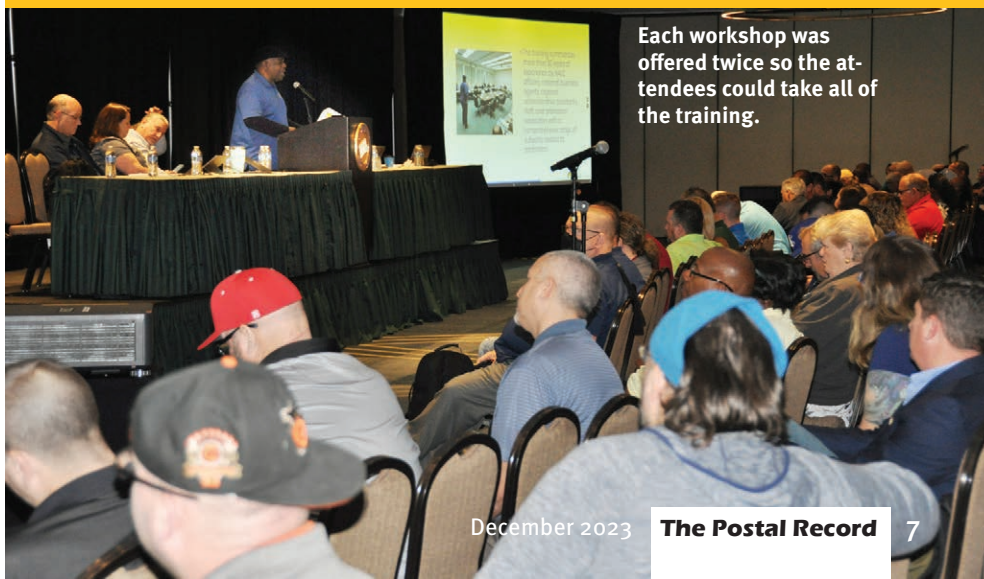
- A new online learning program to complement the in-person training that NALC does well on a local, regional and national level.
- An emergency response team of letter carriers to help NALC members when they're dealing with trauma, not to serve as counselors, but rather to offer peer-to-peer support in situations like suicide awareness, suicide prevention, mental health issues or substance abuse.
- A mentoring program for women in the union. "The idea behind this is to structure a program that for any of our members that face challenges just because of the fact that they are a woman, they have someone they can reach out to to help them navigate that challenge," he said.
- A standing committee for diversity issues. "Everyone in our union deserves and should have the opportunity to learn and to be involved, no matter who they are, no matter where they're from," he said. "And if we do that, and we make conscious efforts to ensure that as we move forward, we give all those who express interest that opportunity, it will allow us to continue to do something we've done for a long time, but I think even move to the next level, of embracing and utilizing the strength that we have through our diversity."

He then moved to the "rap" portion, taking approximately an hour's worth of questions from the attendees, primarily about issues related to contract negotiations, uniforms and route adjustments, before adjourning the meeting at about 11 a.m. **PR**

Workshops offer more updates

On Saturday, Nov. 18, attendees had the opportunity to attend four workshops on a multitude of topics important to letter carriers. The four workshops were:

- Executive Vice President Paul Barner, Vice President James Henry and Director of City Delivery Chris Jackson—along with Assistants to the President for Contract Administration Greg Dixon, Danielle Fake-Moorman and Jazmin Correa, and Assistant to the President for City Delivery Stephen Stewart—informed the attendees on national and regional arbitration and Step B updates, dispute resolution training for branch leaders and city delivery issues.
- Director of Life Insurance Jim Yates, Director of Health Benefits Stephanie Stewart, Director of Retired Members Dan Toth and Assistant to the President for Administration Chris Henwood talked about the benefits and offerings of the health and life insurance companies and about issues affecting current and future retirees.
- Secretary-Treasurer Nicole Rhine, Assistant Secretary-Treasurer Mack Julion, and Director of Safety and Health Manuel L. Peralta Jr. discussed issues related to branch dues, branch bylaw changes and the Employee Assistance Program.
- Special Executive Assistant to the President Tim McKay; Special Assistants to the President Doug Lape and Michelle McQuality; Assistants to the President for Administration Tamara Twinn, Mandy Hankins, Ron Osborne and Ed Morgan; Assistant to the President for Workers' Compensation Coby Jones; and Assistant to the President for Legislative and Political Organizing Brent Fjerstad provided updates on the New Employee Experience and Retention Program, USPS vehicles, the alternate dispute resolution process, Sorting and Delivery Centers, the Technology Integrated Alternate Route Evaluation and Adjustment Process, NALC's communications efforts, research and resources through NALC publications and website, OWCP and the Letter Carrier Political Fund. **PR**



Each workshop was offered twice so the attendees could take all of the training.