

Update on contract talks



**Paul
Barner**

As the NALC's executive vice president, I have the honor—and the duty under our union's constitution—to serve as the chief spokesman for our union in contract talks with the Postal Service. As we go to press this month, NALC and the Postal Service have agreed to continue negotiations on a new collective-bargaining agreement. The current agreement, which was set to expire at 12 o'clock on the evening of Saturday, May 20, will remain in full force until a new negotiated or arbitrated agreement takes effect.

A mandatory 60-day mediation period will follow, as required by statute. NALC will continue to

work toward reaching a negotiated agreement with the Postal Service during this 60-day period. Issues that remain in dispute after the mediation period would be addressed through an interest arbitration process, which would result in a final and binding decision on the contents of a new national agreement. The parties will select a neutral arbitrator to chair an arbitration board that would also include one management and one union arbitrator.

Further updates will be provided as the process moves forward.

The entire Executive Council and a team of Headquarters staffers have been mobilized to fight for improvements in city carrier pay and working conditions. As we reported earlier, we formed a variety of internal subcommittees to focus on dozens of contractual issues and to develop proposed changes and/or additions to our National Agreement. The subcommittees are composed of national business agents, resident national officers, and staff with specific expertise on the issues under consideration. Without exception, the subcommittees took their work seriously and labored diligently to reach consensus. All together, they reviewed each article in our labor contract for possible revisions, guided by the whole range of contract resolutions adopted by past NALC Conventions—the highest authority in our democratic union.

The subcommittees produced possible contract proposals for review by the resident officers, who then worked to revise and prioritize the proposals.

We finalized formal proposals to pass across the collective-bargaining table to postal management. These proposals focus on the most urgent challenges facing city carriers: the chronic understaffing we've experienced in recent years, the rising threat of crime on the job, mistreatment and bullying by managers, management's failure to comply with our contract's overtime provisions, scheduling matters and leave policies, and the need to improve our handling of grievances and the Dispute Resolution Process.

We have met with our management counterparts repeatedly, sometimes in the Sombrotto building and sometimes at the L'Enfant Plaza headquarters of the Postal Service, to exchange proposals. We have explained each of our proposals and answered management's questions.

Even as we engage in negotiations on these other issues, our focus remains on the most important issue in any contract—the need to properly compensate city letter carriers to reward those who serve as the public face of the Postal Service. We are convinced that significantly increased compensation is not only deserved by our members, but crucial to solving the Postal Service's staffing crisis.

Our goal is to hammer out a tentative, multiyear National Agreement covering all the terms and conditions for America's city letter carriers. If we are successful, we will send that tentative contract out to our active membership for consideration and a ratification vote. We will use our website and social media platforms to provide updates on our talks when necessary.

Our active members should know that even as we bargain in good faith to reach a settlement, we are also preparing to seek a new contract through binding interest arbitration. We are collecting data, hiring expert witnesses, and developing exhibits and testimony in support of our contract proposals. While we prefer a voluntary agreement that letter carriers can vote on, we are ready, willing and able to pursue our goals in arbitration if we reach an impasse.

We intend to remain at the bargaining table so long as productive negotiations are possible. No matter which path we pursue, we aim to achieve the best possible contract for the most productive and admired postal workers in the world. Because our union is strong and united in solidarity, I have every confidence that we will succeed.