

Postal contracts

Rurals head to arbitration

APWU talks continue



Given the current economic climate, it is no surprise that negotiations for a new contract between the U.S. Postal Service and its employee unions would be challenging, to say the least. In fact, that's one of the reasons the 2010 Convention of the National Association of Letter Carriers authorized the NALC's Executive Council to explore the possibility of beginning contract talks more than a year before our current agreement expires.

The agreements for both the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association and the American Postal Workers Union expired last November, and as this issue of *The Postal Record* was being prepared, talks between the APWU and the Postal Service were stalled. The NRLCA, meanwhile, announced Nov. 20 that it had reached an impasse with USPS, and any agreement between the two was headed to binding arbitration.

According to the NRLCA, at issue were some of the Postal Service's final proposals, which included wage freezes and significant benefit cuts for current career employees—including doing away with cost-of-living salary adjustments—plus a new pay schedule that essentially creates a two-tier workforce with a lower wage scale for new hires. The NRLCA also said that the Postal Service proposed eliminating the parties' no-layoff clause for all but the most senior employees.

A few days later, the Service issued a press release containing its update on contract talks with both unions, a missive NALC President Fredric V. Rolando described as “full of spin and distortions aimed at influencing public opinion.”

“We recognize that the USPS faces major challenges that need to be

addressed to secure its future,” Rolando said, “but this cannot be done responsibly if one party engages in blatant and self-serving attempts to mislead people.”

The Postal Service statement said that, in the event of a collective bargaining impasse, “an arbitrator determines the final outcome and is not legally required to consider the Postal Service's financial obligations when rendering a decision.”

“This is nonsense,” Rolando responded, “because arbitrators are required to consider all evidence presented by the parties. Since the USPS always presents information on its financial situation, its finances always are considered.”

“The press release phrasing is a thinly disguised attempt to prompt congressional meddling in the traditional labor-management process by legislation that would insert one-sided language favoring the Postal Service's positions,” he said. “We don't think it's the role of Congress to get involved in interest arbitration on behalf of either side, including ours.”

The Postal Service put a spin on the issue of eliminating Saturday delivery, claiming the public favors five-day delivery over using taxpayer funds and other alternatives.

“How would the public respond,” Rolando wondered, “if the question was whether people would rather lose a day of mail service and see 80,000 people thrown into unemployment, to realize a relatively meager savings of at most \$3.1 billion annually—or instead see the Postal Service simply transfer money from one account to another, thereby coming up with \$5.5 billion at no cost to taxpayers, and not slashing services or engaging in mass layoffs?”

Besides, he said, “the USPS well knows that the Postal Service has not received a tax subsidy since 1983—and no one is proposing that it begin to do so now.”

The USPS release also called for a change in the type of employees it has, stating, “To remain strong into the future, the Postal Service needs to control costs through a flexible workforce to adapt to the nation’s changing mailing trends.”

“We all know what this means—a decrease in quality through transforming the workforce into a collection of temporary employees, rather than maintaining the current high standards of a

workforce that the very same press release says has led the public to regard the Postal Service as the most trusted government agency six consecutive years,” Rolando said.

“These various spins, half-truths or outright distortions are no way to inform the public and to have a rational discussion about the best way to secure the future of a great national institution on which 150 million households and businesses rely for mail delivery six days a week,” Rolando concluded. “We stand ready to engage in a serious discussion that considers the best interests of the American people.” ☒

Miami carrier shot, killed on his route

Letter carrier Bruce Parton, a member of South Florida Branch 1071, was shot and killed while delivering mail to an apartment complex on his route Dec. 6.

Shortly before 3 on that Monday afternoon, police were called to the Miami neighborhood after a report of shots fired in the area. When they arrived on the scene, they found that Parton had been shot at least twice.

Eyewitnesses told police that after the shooting, the gunman tried to drive off in Parton’s LLV but soon abandoned the truck a short distance away before fleeing on foot.

“We can’t say for sure robbery was the motive for this killing,” U.S. Postal Inspector Bladimir Rojo told *The Miami Herald*. “At first glance of the inside of the truck, we can’t tell if any mail trays were taken.”

Parton was quickly airlifted via a helicopter that landed on a field at a nearby elementary school. He was

later pronounced dead at Jackson Memorial Hospital.

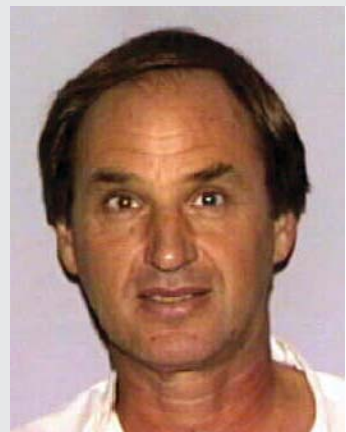
“It’s a tragic loss of our brother and fellow letter carrier,” Branch 1071 President Mike Gill said. “Our members’ thoughts and prayers are with his family.”

The 60-year-old Parton was a letter carrier for 29 years. He was married and had a 15-year-old son as well as an adult son and daughter.

“Letter carriers all across America mourn this senseless, tragic loss,” NALC President Fredric V. Rolando said.

As this *Postal Record* was being prepared, police were still searching for the shooter. Meanwhile, the Postal Inspection Service has offered a \$50,000 reward for information leading to the shooter’s arrest. The toll-free phone number is 877-876-2455.

NALC members may send sympathy cards and letters to Parton’s family at: Family of Bruce Parton, P.O. Box 693754, Miami, FL 33269-3754. ☒



Bruce Parton