

New duties, Part 1



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Well, I'm about a month into this now. President Rolando has assigned me a list of duties and responsibilities that come with the position of vice president. One of my new tasks is to study all aspects of the grievance-arbitration procedure and look for ways to improve the process we have.

This includes national grievance issues, regional arbitration, intervention, the Step B DRTs, etc. Stated another way: from start to finish. This subject will take a few columns to report on. I'm going to start with national and regional arbitration.

National grievance issues—We currently have 21 issues pending at the national level. The Contract Administration Unit (CAU) has been working hard to reduce this number for a long time now (mostly through negotiations at the 11th hour before a national arbitration hearing is scheduled to begin). It might sound a little wacky, but we have made a lot of progress in the last few years functioning this way.

The goal is to continue working to establish and maintain a path either to resolve or to arbitrate national issues as they arise more quickly than we have in the past. We're going to begin by taking a fresh look at the issues we have pending and making a good-faith effort to resolve what we can.

Regional arbitration issues—We have 3,845 cases pending at the regional level nationwide. Of those, 1,137 are local memorandum of understanding (LMOU) impasse cases. This round of local negotiations has produced more impasses that have reached the point of being scheduled for arbitration than we have seen in at least the past 20 years. Normally, we would have 10 percent to 20 percent of what we currently have pending on LMOU impasses at this point in the process.

LMOU impasse cases are heard in interest arbitration. This process is different from normal arbitration over discipline and contract grievances. We had to choose a special panel of arbitrators that offered dates for only LMOU impasse hearings. Now that everything is in place, these issues will start moving.

At least half the pending cases concern the issue of whether or not CCAs should be entitled to take a vacation like everybody else and, if so, how that will work. We have three simple points:

- CCAs should be granted a vacation each year if they want one.

- CCAs should choose their vacation time frame by relative standing order after the letter carriers with normal seniority select their vacation time frames. The details of how this happens should be worked out locally.
- CCAs should either be counted in the calculation that determines how many letter carriers are allowed off during the choice vacation period or not counted against the number of career letter carriers allowed off on annual leave during the choice vacation period.

There are several hundred other LMOU impasse issues that have nothing to do with CCAs pending impasse arbitration. Some are management impasses where they are trying to change existing provisions and some are NALC impasses where we are trying to change existing provisions or add new ones. LMOU impasse cases started getting scheduled in April. This sets the stage for 11th-hour settlements, which in turn gives both parties one last opportunity at finally bridging our differences and finding resolution. This is where something really happens if it is going to.

For instance, we had 91 LMOU impasse cases scheduled in April. That's a heavy caseload, given that it is in addition to the normal arbitration schedule for each region. As of this writing, we are less than two weeks into it and have resolved more than 30 cases and arbitrated 10. We expect to have this kind of caseload for the next several months.

We are hoping that we can find a way to resolve most of the pending LMOU disputes without having to ask a neutral arbitrator to decide them for us. However, we are prepared to arbitrate these disputes in every region in the country if the 11th-hour negotiations don't work out.

Each region has selected advocates to present LMOU impasse cases in arbitration. We have done our best to work with each national business agent's office to provide our advocates any assistance we can. All of our advocates understand the differences between a traditional contract/discipline case and an interest arbitration case. Our LMOU impasse advocates are fully prepared and ready to roll when and where they are needed around the country.

The next step is to look for ways to reduce the pending arbitration cases backlog that exists in some areas of the country. The road to success isn't that complicated. We need to start settling disputes that we end up settling at the 11th hour sooner and work on making the arbitration scheduling process more efficient. I'll spend the rest of this term of office working on this and will report back later in the year. Have a great food drive!