

Dues—the engine powering the union



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It's that time of year again—a time some members may dread and branch financial officers welcome: the announcement of the next year's dues increase. This information is provided at the end of this column—the increase reflecting two cost-of-living adjustments and the wage increase effective Nov. 15.

Nobody likes having money taken out of his or her paycheck, but it's often necessary—Social Security contributions, federal and state withholding or Thrift Savings Plan contributions, for example. And, as far as the union is concerned, there are the automatic voluntary deductions to COLCPE for many, but not

enough, of our members, and obviously union dues.

As your secretary-treasurer for the last 12 years and now nearing the end of my run, I am well aware of the importance of the dues in financing this union's increasingly complex challenges—challenges that certainly will not abate once I vacate my office. Revenue from the sale of NALC “gear” is welcome but, frankly, is insignificant.

So financially, where are we, and what are the challenges ahead?

Basically, we're in decent shape—certainly given the circumstances of the last several years: a depressed economy affecting mail volume, and the number of city carriers delivering the nation's mail and belonging to the NALC; as well as increased expenses for training, economic consulting, and strategic activities designed to make the case to the American people that the USPS must be strengthened, not dismantled by inept management and legislative proposals to shrink the quality of our service.

Frankly, we're in a little better shape than I feared, given all the blows the USPS has suffered recently—and all of the money we've spent fighting back. Part of the reason we're doing OK financially is that the number of active members has grown recently. Our active membership has increased by more than 7,000 in just the past two years, and this trend should continue in the short run.

On the other hand, we shouldn't get carried away, because we're still down by 43,000 active members since 2000 because of reductions in the size of the craft. Moreover, CCAs are not joining the union at the same rate that career carriers traditionally have joined. This means that the overall organizing percentage is not what it used to

be—or what it should be if we are to retain the revenue stream necessary to perform all of the diverse activities essential to keeping the Postal Service strong and the job of a letter carrier a good job with good pay and decent working conditions.

Active member dues are not our only source of revenue—we have roughly 77,000 *dues-paying* retirees, paying \$7 annually in national dues, an amount that has not increased for more than 50 years. Obviously raising retiree dues is a step delegates to a future national convention should consider seriously.

Finally, NALC has considerable investment income, as is reported in the bi-annual financial reports in *The Postal Record* and the secretary-treasurer's financial reports to our biennial conventions. But as some of you know painfully, investments are not a stable source of income. That is why I have communicated to the Executive Council on several occasions that we should not put the union in a position where we are dependent on our investment income. It is also why I have recommended to the Council specific steps to control costs.

Nonetheless, as I near the end of my time serving as your national secretary-treasurer, I am pleased to report that the union is in good financial shape—and should remain so as long as our investments do well, we continue to organize the continuing influx of CCAs, and we control expenses.

Dues change

A biweekly dues increase for year 2015 will occur in Pay Period 1 of 2015 (Dec. 13-26, 2014) due to the upcoming Nov. 15 wage increase. This will be reflected in the dues deducted, beginning with the Jan. 2, 2015, paycheck. As a result, the dues increase will be incorporated into the branch reimbursements of Jan. 23, 2015.

Minimum dues as set forth in Article 7, Section 2 (a) of the *NALC Constitution* are the equivalent of two hours' base pay for an NALC Grade 1, Step D letter carrier per *month*. Since dues are deducted *bi-weekly*, this amount is \$24.40 for 2015. National retains one-third of this amount, \$8.12, and remits the other two thirds to the local branches (with some withheld for state associations and remitted by National Headquarters to the state associations monthly).

Some branches have set dues higher than the minimum dues and may increase local dues during the year, as do some state associations. Any increase in a branch's local dues cannot be processed before Pay Period 4 (Jan. 27, 2015). *Dues corrections or changes to be made in 2014 cannot be processed after Nov. 4.*