

Arbitration—Regional level



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This follows last month's article regarding updates to our arbitration scheduling procedures pilot tests taking place in many parts of the country. When it comes to regional arbitration, our goal is to reach the point where grievances are routinely scheduled to be heard in arbitration within 120 days of appeal to arbitration in every region across the nation.

Some say this goal cannot be reached due to the differences in atmosphere and opportunity that exist in some parts of the country. I respectfully disagree, but I do admit this makes me that much more determined to reach our goal.

Some say this goal of arbitration within 120 days of appeal is an excessive time to wait for a hearing. We would love to deliver instant arbitration to everyone, but our system doesn't work like that, and in my experience, it never did.

I started serving as an arbitration advocate in January 1997 and was very active doing hearings until well after the Dispute Resolution Process (DRP) went nationwide in 2001. Back then, most discipline cases in the region I came from (Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee) took between six months and a year from the date of issue to reach an arbitration hearing. Contract grievances were another ballgame altogether. It was the norm to expect a wait of at least one year for an arbitration hearing. The same was true in plenty of the other regions as well.

Today, we still have discipline cases that take the same amount of time to reach an arbitration hearing in some parts of the country, but we are seeing that less and less as time goes on. The same is true for contract cases. I can report that we have made tremendous progress in the last few years.

Two years ago, nationwide, we had 3,382 cases pending regional arbitration. Of the pending cases, 2,732 of them were not scheduled for a hearing, with 1,855 of those being older than 120 days from the date appealed to arbitration.

Let's compare that to where we are now. Today, we have 1,059 cases pending arbitration nationwide, with 573 of the pending cases not scheduled yet for a hearing. Of the 1,059 pending cases, 411 are older than 120 days from the date appealed to arbitration. Of those, 78 cases have been heard and are awaiting a decision and 170 of them are scheduled for a hearing. That leaves 163 cases pending arbitration that are older than 120 days from the date ap-

pealed to arbitration and are not scheduled for a hearing. Of these 163 cases, 122 come from one region.

Much of the progress that has been made is a direct result of the arbitration pilot tests that I reported on last month and our nationwide efforts to discuss all new Step B impasses at the regional/area level within 30 days of an impasse.

We can thank all the national business agents, regional administrative assistants and arbitration advocates for the progress we have made in the area of regional arbitration over the past two years. You are all doing a great job, and your efforts are appreciated.

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The next step we want to take to address the places we have left that are not meeting our national goal of routinely hearing cases in a timely fashion is to add enough additional arbitrators and/or arbitration dates to keep up with their caseload.

Some may think that adding arbitrators to an existing panel is as simple as picking up the phone and calling in an order. I wish it was that easy, but adding arbitrators to an existing panel is just not as simple as ordering a pizza.

Arbitration panels are established for each region each time we get a new national agreement. The selection of which arbitrators will serve on a panel is a joint process. Every NALC region has its own panel of arbitrators. Likewise, once a panel is jointly selected for a region, any changes must be made by mutual agreement.

We have been successful in adding arbitrators to existing panels in a few regions. We are also working on reaching agreement with the Postal Service to solicit arbitrators on existing panels (in regions where we routinely do not use all the arbitration dates offered) to hear cases in different regions that are not having their cases heard by an arbitrator in a timely fashion. We hope to turn this idea into reality soon.

Thanks again to everyone for all your efforts. Happy birthday, America!