

A change at the top of the USPS



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As we reported last month, Postmaster General Megan Brennan will be retiring next month after a 33-year career in the Postal Service. But the change in leadership has already been well underway for months. That's because, for the first time in more than five years, the Postal Service now has a functioning Board of Governors. Even though the Board still has four vacant seats, it now has five Senate-confirmed members: Robert M. Duncan (who serves as chairman), David Williams, John Barger, Ron Bloom and Roman Martinez IV. The decisions it makes over the next few months and years could make a huge difference for the future of the

Postal Service.

One of the most consequential decisions the Board must make is the appointment of the 75th postmaster general of the United States. Governor John Barger is leading a board committee to recruit candidates for the job. He announced that the board had hired an executive search company, Russell Reynolds Associates, to assist in the process. This suggests that the Board is looking outside of the Postal Service for its next leader, though internal candidates also will be considered. We hope that the Board will choose a leader who has experience working with unions and is both committed to the public mission of the Postal Service—to bind the nation together economically, politically and culturally—and dedicated to a growth and innovation agenda.

As we have argued for years, the Postal Service cannot thrive in the 21st century with a “shrink to survive” mentality. We have the best first- and last-mile delivery networks in the country, and the opportunity for growth in the e-commerce age is tremendous. What we need is a leader with vision and the ambition to make a great institution even better.

To communicate our views on this important appointment, we are joining the other postal unions and the Grand Alliance to Save Our Public Postal Service to collect signatures for a petition addressed to the Board of Governors. The petition states: “We, the undersigned, believe in a public Postal Service committed to providing quality service to everyone, no matter who they are or where they live, at reasonable and uniform rates. Our United States Postal Service is an essential part of the fabric of the country and a source of good, living wage jobs for our communities. We call on you to appoint a

Postmaster General who is fully committed to universal service and the public ownership of the Postal Service.” Visit the NALC website to learn more about this effort.

Equally important for the future will be the Board's decisions on its future business plan. Strategic planning has been a major weakness at the Postal Service—a problem made much worse by the public policy inaction we've endured over the past decade regarding postal legislative and regulatory reform. This cannot continue. One encouraging sign coming out of the Governors' Nov. 13-14 meeting was a decision to delay the release of the Integrated Financial Plan for Fiscal Year 2020 or any other long-term plan. A 10-year plan that was presented to the Postal Service's congressional oversight committees earlier this year was widely panned as a non-starter, with its focus on reducing service and its lack of a growth strategy. It is a good sign that the board is taking its time to reconsider the Postal Service's strategic plan. It is our hope that the new board will work with the Postal Service's major stakeholders, including the four postal unions, and with Congress to build a 21st century Postal Service we can all be proud of.

The newly reconstituted Board of Governors faces a difficult challenge. As I predicted in this space last month, the Postal Service reported a large financial loss in November, driven mainly by public policy and regulatory decisions that must be addressed. To succeed, the new leadership of the Postal Service will need help from Congress and the Postal Regulatory Commission. The leaders also will need to earn the trust and support of the Postal Service's 600,000 employees. NALC is committed to working in good faith with the Board and whomever is chosen as the next PMG to strengthen the Postal Service and to do what is right for the country we serve.

Update on contract negotiations

As this issue of *The Postal Record* was going to press, NALC and management negotiators were approaching the end of the 60-day mediation period following the Sept. 20 expiration of our National Agreement with USPS. The parties remain at impasse and are discussing the selection of a neutral arbitrator.

Although NALC will continue to bargain in good faith, we will not delay the interest arbitration process.

Under the law, both NALC and postal management will name one arbitrator and select a third neutral arbitrator to serve as the chairman of the arbitration board. Both sides will present evidence and testimony to the arbitration board, which will, following hearings, issue a final and binding decision on the contents of our next collective-bargaining agreement. While these impasse procedures are taking place, the terms of our 2016-19 National Agreement remain in effect.