

The bell rings on Round 15



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By the time you read this, the next round of collective bargaining between the NALC and the United States Postal Service will have begun. We have negotiated or arbitrated 14 contracts since 1970 and hope to negotiate our 15th National Agreement this year. The situation surrounding this round of talks is remarkably similar to the situation we faced three and a half years ago when we began negotiations for our current National Agreement.

- The legislative stalemate over postal reform legislation remains, despite the broad consensus within the mailing industry regarding the necessary components of such legislation.
- The impact of the retiree health pre-funding mandate continues to distort the overall financial picture surrounding the Postal Service, accounting for 100 percent of the Postal Service's losses over the past six years.
- And, once again, the Postal Service is simultaneously engaged with bargaining or arbitrations with the other postal unions, having recently reached a tentative settlement on a new contract with the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association.

As was the case in 2016, these factors will have little or no impact on the NALC's agenda in this round of collective bargaining. Our unique and indispensable role in the success of the Postal Service dictates a concerted focus on city carrier issues. That approach led to the negotiated 2016-2019 agreement that will expire in September.

We have every intention of securing a voluntary agreement this time—even though we remain fully prepared to resort to binding arbitration, if need be, to achieve our goals. As always, we will fight to preserve and improve the standard of living for city letter carriers. We will do so defending our cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) clause and working to secure reasonable wage increases to reward the hard work of city carriers, who are essential to the success of the Postal Service. We also will endeavor to build on the progress we have made in narrowing the gap between city carrier assistant (CCA) and career compensation, and maintain our contract's ban on subcontracting letter carrier work.

We have other important priorities as well. Notably, it has become clear that management does not choose to acknowledge, much less address, the toxic workplace culture that exists in too many post offices across the country. We had hoped that the memorandum of understanding on workplace culture negotiated in the 2016 contract would result in a serious effort by management to jointly address offices with such work environments. We will aggressively explore other options in this round of collective bargaining.

The dysfunctional work environment, along with many other factors, continues to produce chronic turnover and instability in the Postal Service's CCA workforce. We will seek to reverse that trend by negotiating accelerated CCA conversions to career status and changes that will facilitate a transition to an all-career workforce.

As the Postal Service's ubiquitous television commercials remind us every day, we make "more e-commerce deliveries to homes than anyone else in the country." That competitive advantage, made possible by our unique and unrivaled first-mile collection and last-mile delivery networks, is being challenged as both Amazon and FedEx SmartPost begin to pull volume from USPS and build their own delivery networks. We will use this round of bargaining to think and to act strategically to grow the Postal Service's e-commerce business by innovating and working to diversify our customer base. NALC will urge the Postal Service to establish a well-resourced, serious and dedicated joint task force on innovation.

We will continue to engage USPS to seriously develop joint practices and solutions to improve safety, efficiency, service and staffing. We also will seek practices and solutions to achieve properly adjusted routes, with an aim toward ending management's unilateral approaches that appear to be designed to fail.

This is the third time I have had the privilege of leading the NALC in contract negotiations. I am extremely proud to be representing America's city letter carriers in this effort. Although there is no guarantee that we will reach a voluntary contract—after all, it takes two to tango—I am very confident that NALC is prepared to make the strongest possible case for our bargaining goals. We aim to reach a win-win contract with the Postal Service if we can. But we are equally committed to fighting for such a contract in interest arbitration, if necessary.

Our union is strong. Our leadership is united. Our cause is righteous. Let us stick together to win what all city carriers deserve—a new, fair and forward-thinking National Agreement.