

What do arbitrators want to know about?



**Lew
Drass**

Most of the arbitrators who make up our NALC panels around the country are members of an organization called the National Academy of Arbitrators (NAA). Not just any arbitrator can be a member of NAA. He or she has to have a lot of experience and several other qualifications to be accepted. That is why we like to choose our arbitrators from this group when we make selections for our panels.

Their organization is not much different than ours except for the fact that it is a lot harder to get into NAA than into NALC. They have a national president and other national officers. They also have regional presidents, instead of national business agents, who have their own smaller annual meetings (conventions)

much like our regional rap/training sessions each year.

The whole NAA has what it calls an annual meeting each year. It is similar to a national arbitrator convention. They have closed-door meetings where they make decisions on the direction of their organization. They also have several (usually four) training classes at different times each day where arbitrators and paid visitors can choose from three or four subjects that run simultaneously. Some of their classes are offered only once and some are repeated.

They always have either a luncheon or a dinner where all of the delegates attend, much like we do at most of our state conventions. They have a keynote speaker and they normally give out an award or two to one of the arbitrators in attendance.

Does any of this sound familiar to you?

The big NAA annual meeting (convention) was held in Philadelphia this year. I was invited to attend their lunch banquet and serve on the “Postal Panel.” Both events took place on Friday, May 31.

The Postal Panel Session is one of the classes they offer each year. They always invite a representative from the Postal Service, the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), the National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU), the National Rural Letter Carriers’ Association (NRLCA) and NALC to serve on a panel. Sometimes, they let us speak about whatever we want and sometimes they choose a theme they ask each organization to talk about. This year’s Postal Panel had a theme: “Postal Arbitration: The Future of the Postal Service—Should the Post Office Act More Like a Private Business?”

They were talking about the report from President Trump’s Task Force on the United States Postal System that was released in December. The report is titled “United States Postal Service: A Sustainable Path Forward.”

The class began with the moderator talking about the background of the report and pointing out some of its major recommendations, such as privatization. Next, each panel member was given an opportunity to speak. It turned out that the APWU and NPMHU could not make the event. This left only the USPS, the NRLCA and NALC to serve on the panel. Since there were only three of us, we each had up to 20 minutes to speak on the topic.

USPS went first. To its credit, it did not express agreement with any of the proposals in the report. The NRLCA went last and did a good job of talking about how the recommendations in the report would devastate rural areas of the country.

I took full advantage of my time. I thoroughly explained why the task force report is not a path for the survival of the Postal Service, but a recipe to dismantle it.

I explained how this task force report talks a lot about USPS losing all kinds of money, but never recognizes that 92 percent of our losses since 2007 are because USPS is required by law to pre-fund retiree health benefit costs more than 75 years into the future. I reminded them that this is an obligation that no other company or federal agency in the country has. Also, that the report failed to recognize that we have \$47.5 billion in an account for future retiree health benefit costs.

I explained how the recommendations in this task force report are based largely on the decline in First Class Mail and the rise of delivery points since 2010. However, the report fails to mention that USPS has run an operating profit each year from 2013 to 2018.

The task force report recommended that USPS reduce delivery days from at least six to an undetermined number of days, eliminate door-to-door delivery, partially privatize by selling access to the mailbox to our competitors, and contract out work. I pointed out that we have/will have a bipartisan majority of Congress that says these are lousy ideas. Where else do you see that these days?

As of this writing, we have:

- 260 co-sponsors on House Resolution 54 (reducing delivery days)
- 220 co-sponsors on H. Res. 23 (opposing elimination of door delivery)
- 254 co-sponsors on H. Res. 33 (opposing privatization of the USPS)
- 53 co-sponsors on Senate Res. 99 (opposing privatization of the USPS)
- 124 co-sponsors on H. R. 2382 (a bill to simply repeal the pre-funding obligation law that was passed in 2006)

H. R. 2382 was introduced on April 29, and we are getting bipartisan support on it, but we need more co-sponsors. Have you contacted your member of the House and asked him or her to support this bill yet? If not, please do.