

Confronting basic bargaining realities at the NALC rap session in Denver



Fredric V. Rolando

As we gathered in Denver for the 2019 rap session, we passed the mid-point of the formal three-month period of collective bargaining that we began in late June. We used our weekend together in Colorado to provide branch leaders from all over the country with a full update on the negotiations. We also covered all the major issues facing our great union as national officers led workshops from the early morning to the early evening on Saturday, repeating them four times so that all who attended got a chance to learn, react and ask questions in each class. One of the most

important items discussed over the weekend concerned our contract talks, which I will focus on here.

In the collective-bargaining workshop, we explained the process to develop the formal proposals we are extending to the Postal Service. This involved the establishment of sub-committees—led by members of the NALC Executive Council and comprised of officers and staff members—that focused on several important subjects, from workplace issues, city delivery matters and safety and health, to route structure, uniforms and innovation strategy. The subcommittees worked for weeks, going over convention resolutions and discussing practical ways to solve problems facing letter carriers. This process generated proposals for main-table discussions (see story on page 6).

On Sunday, I laid out some basic realities driving our agenda in this round of bargaining. For example, it is clear to us that there is no place in the city carrier craft for non-career workers. Further, there is overwhelming evidence that postal management has neither the desire nor the ability to fix the Postal Service's most serious problems without our involvement. These problems range from a toxic workplace culture that tolerates abuse and wage/time theft and an inability to manage staffing at the local level, to a lack of concern over health and safety and the inadequate effort to innovate and grow the Postal Service's business at the national level.

These and other basic realities we face require an end to unilateral management initiatives that won't work. We

hope we can convince the Postal Service to see that without a partnership with its most important asset—its last-mile delivery workers—progress will be impossible in the ever-more challenging environment we face. So whether it's the ill-advised consolidated casing initiative, the unilateral route adjustments, or its seemingly short-sighted approach to collective bargaining, we aim to convince the Postal Service that it needs to use this round of bargaining to change course. The USPS needs a win-win contract with the NALC more than ever.

I then outlined some specific issues we are addressing with the proposals to the USPS. Many are common to every round of collective bargaining—pay increases to reward letter carriers for our contributions to the Postal Service and to recognize the increasing difficulty of our work, the preservation of cost-of-living adjustments, the maintenance of protections against sub-contracting and layoffs. But others are unique to this round of talks or have been generated by our sub-committees—such as advancing a plan for automatic career conversions and the eventual phase-out of non-career employment in our craft. Similarly, we are pressing management to create truly national and jointly managed programs on safety and health, route adjustments and other matters that are too important to be left solely to management.

In Denver, I made it clear that NALC will work in good faith to reach a fair contract. I also advised our leadership that extended bargaining beyond the Sep. 20 expiration of our current contract is not likely. We aim to achieve a voluntary settlement and to send it out to the active membership for ratification. But we are also diligently preparing for interest arbitration if that proves impossible. Either way, the voices of city letter carriers will be heard.

Of course, we focused on more than contract negotiations in Denver. The depth and the breadth of our collective efforts to represent letter carriers goes far beyond negotiating the next contract. Enforcing the existing contract, serving our members when they need us, fighting for our rights in Congress, and working to strengthen the Postal Service and our country are always on our agenda. Convening with nearly a thousand leaders and activists from every corner of the country who are all dedicated to doing this vital work is truly energizing. I thank all the branches that participated and all the members who attended. No matter what happens in this round of talks, I have no doubt that the NALC will emerge from it unified and strong.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fredric V. Rolando'.