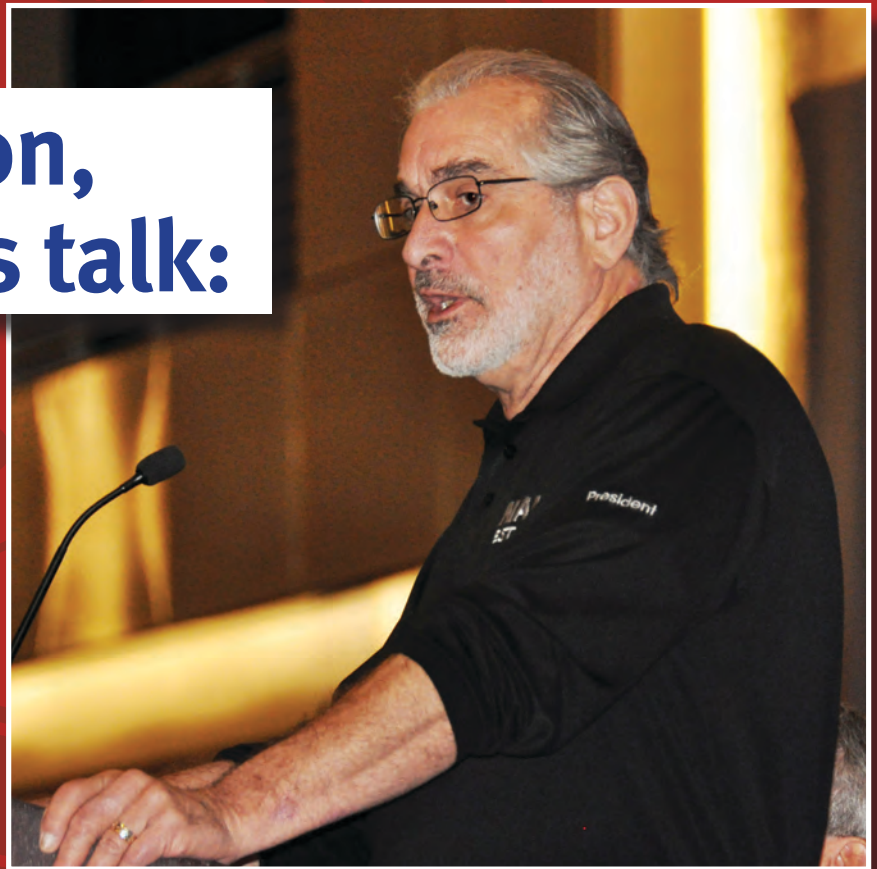


At rap session, NALC leaders talk:

- ongoing contract negotiations
- legislative and political priorities
- contractual issues with management



Opposite page: NALC President Fredric Rolando (top) addresses the crowd (bottom) at the rap session in Denver.

Nearly 1,000 letter carrier activists representing branches across the United States gathered in Denver in August to take part in NALC's 2019 National Conference. The *NALC Constitution* calls for the union to hold a national conference in non-convention, odd-numbered years.

The meeting—commonly called a “rap session”—took place approximately halfway through the 90-day bargaining period for a new national collective-bargaining agreement with the U.S. Postal Service.

NALC President Fredric Rolando called the Aug. 11 meeting to order at 8 a.m. and invited Denver Branch 47 President **Alejandro Aguilar** to lead participants in the Pledge of Allegiance. Minneapolis Branch 9 President **Mike Zagaros** sang the National Anthem, and Los Angeles Branch 24 Sergeant-at-Arms **Leon Prude** delivered the invocation.

Rolando then introduced the members of NALC's Executive Council before recognizing the regional administrative assistants (RAAs), regional workers' compensation assistants (RWCAs), legislative and political organizers (LPOs), regional grievance assistants (RGAs), Headquarters letter carrier and professional staff members, nationally assigned assistants, and state association and branch presidents present at the meeting.

“I want to remind everybody in this room of what makes this union strong,” Rolando said. “All of you have stepped up to represent your brothers and sisters on a daily basis on the workroom floor. That's what makes the NALC strong.”

Bargaining update

President Rolando then talked about the bargaining process, noting that

preparations had begun at the end of the last round of negotiations. “Last time it took 15 months to negotiate that contract,” he said. “As soon as we were done, we began prepping for the next round of bargaining.”

He said that the union has been working on two tracks, one involving the negotiations themselves and the second laying the groundwork for making a case for interest arbitration should negotiating prove unfruitful.

The president discussed the work of the bargaining committees and their internal preparation of proposals for this round of negotiations. (See story on page 8.)

He also talked about the results of the negotiations by the other postal unions. As reported in last month's *Postal Record*, the National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU) recently opened its negotiating period. The American Postal Workers Union (APWU) failed to reach an agreement and was selecting its three-person interest arbitration panel when this issue of *The Postal Record* was being prepared. The National Rural Letter Carriers' Association (NRLCA) reached a tentative agreement and announced that the agreement was ratified in early August.

Rolando said that NALC's leadership remains in communication with the other unions as a way to assist each other.

He then spoke about the “basic realities” regarding letter carriers and the Postal Service that drive the union's agenda and that shape NALC's goals and strategies through negotiations, as well as the preparation of a possible interest arbitration case should the parties not reach agreement.

National-level issues

President Rolando touched on a number of national-level arbitrations

Members wait their turn to ask a question of President Rolando and the Executive Council.





The NALC Executive Council

and other issues the union is dealing with. He began by addressing the pay consolidation case and the city carrier assistant cap. And he explained how these cases came about and where the union is going with them.

He also discussed the ongoing case consolidation tests in locations throughout the country. He explained how the tests violate the contract and how the union plans to move forward to address these issues.

“We will continue to stay ahead of this,” he said. “We will make sure every branch has the resources that they need to be all over this.

“The key is being informed and educated and letting the carriers know how important it is to do the job the right way.”

Rolando also touched on the union’s objections to the current safety ambassador program. He then briefly explained that USPS informed NALC that it would engage a third party to develop new standards and test them under Article 34 of the contract. And he spoke about management’s test with cameras in postal vehicles and elsewhere. The union plans to move forward with a national-level grievance on this test, he said.

Increased representation

Over the last few years, NALC has created several positions to increase letter carriers’ representation in the field. President Rolando outlined the new positions:

- **Regional workers’ compensation assistants (RWCAs):** Letter

carriers who handle workers’ compensation cases. They work through the regional offices. “We’ll expand that program as necessary in the future,” he added.

- **Legislative and political organizers (LPOs):** Letter carriers who work on advancing the legislative and political agenda in support of the work of the state associations.
- **Regional grievance assistants (RGAs):** Letter carriers who work through the national business agents’ offices to “fill any holes in our representation,” Rolando said. They will work as outside stewards where necessary and ensure that representation and training reaches members in branches of all sizes.

Legislation and politics

The president then switched to a topic he has addressed frequently over the last decade. He began by acknowledging that almost everyone who signed up to be a leader in the union did so for reasons other than legislation and politics.

“But, if you’re going to be a leader in this union, and you want to represent your members, you’re in it,” he said. “You have to engage in legislation and politics. And I know that takes a lot of people out of their comfort zones.

“The most dangerous challenge we face as letter carriers is the attacks on our jobs, our benefits, the company we





work for, our ability to collectively bargain and, basically, the [threatened] destruction of the Postal Service,” he said. “The most difficult challenge we face is finding opportunities to educate our members as to what is the danger and what we can do about it.

“We must make this a priority at the branch level and find ways and opportunities to educate the rest of our members as to what the dangers are and what we can do about them,” Rolando said.

He called on the leaders in the room to come up with a comfortable narrative for informing the members they represent.

“When they understand what we’re up against and what we need to do, they will step up,” he said.

There are three major areas of danger, he explained. The first is postal reform to deal with the manufactured pre-funding crisis from 2006 legislation.

“Overnight, the Postal Service was \$100 billion in the red,” he said. Even though USPS deposited \$50 billion over the next few years, more than \$5 billion in annual payments never end—between amortization of the unfunded liability, annual ‘normal cost’ adjustments and the annual rate of increased health care costs.

To confront the pre-funding crisis, NALC engages in the legislative process. But by doing so, it opens the door to legislators and other groups who want to take advantage of the opportunity to advance their agendas, including weakening or privatizing USPS. This includes the push to go to five-day delivery and to end door-to-door delivery.

“We need bipartisan majority support in both houses of Congress to move the postal reform we need to protect us and to stop the postal reform that attacks us,” Rolando said.

The second area of danger involves congressional budgets. Despite Congress’s recent inability to pass a budget, there are many dangerous budget proposals that might get taken up if Congress does act. These include raising the contribution rate by 6.5 percent for retirement benefits, reducing the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) by half a percent each year, eliminating any COLAs for retirees in the Federal Employee Retirement System (FERS), eliminating the FERS supplement for those retiring at “minimum retirement age” and increasing in health benefit contributions, among others.

“Who is going to make those decisions? The same 535 people,” he said. “We need bipartisan majority support in both chambers of Congress to stop bad budget proposals.”

The third threat comes from the White House. The president’s postal task force report called for the elimination of postal employees’ collective bargaining.

“We would go back to collective begging,” Rolando said.

The task force report also included eliminating the postal monopoly, changing the definition of essential mail and more. Most of the proposals would require legislation, which means it would depend on Congress to enact them or not.



During registration, NALC members had the opportunity to get information from Headquarters, including on community services and the Disaster Relief Foundation (above) and NALC’s legislative priorities (opposite page).

“These are the risks and there is our audience,” he explained, “the 535 members of Congress.”

Fortunately, the 285,000 NALC members are in every congressional district and match the broad ideological spectrum of members of Congress. “We can send in any congressional office a group of members who can say, ‘I support you, I vote for you, I believe in your ideology, but this legislation

is good or bad for your people in your district,’” he said.

NALC has two primary tools for engaging in legislation and politics. Members of Congress need votes as well as money for their election campaigns. With the NALC Member App, the union can alert letter carriers about the need to contact members of Congress when legislation is up for a vote. With the Letter Carrier Political Fund, NALC has



Bargaining committees meet as negotiations continue

As reported in last month’s issue of *The Postal Record*, the National Association of Letter Carriers and the United States Postal Service formally opened negotiations for a new collective-bargaining agreement on June 26. Since that ceremony, discussions have continued as the various bargaining committees meet on specific issues while main-table negotiations take place.

Members of the NALC Executive Council are each assigned to bargaining committees. Secretary-Treasurer Nicole Rhine was assigned to be the resource

officer for the committees. In addition, staff members from NALC Headquarters were assigned to assist each committee. The Executive Council bargaining committee assignments are:

Main table: President Fredric Rolando, Executive Vice President Brian Renfroe and Director of Life Insurance James W. “Jim” Yates (pictured above)

(The following committees are pictured on the opposite page, from top; members not in order.)

Workplace issues: Director of Retired Members Dan Toth, Region 2 National Business Agent (NBA) Nick Vafiades,

the money to help elect congressional representatives who support letter carrier issues.

“I believe the vast majority of our members who do not contribute to the fund have no idea what we’re up against, what our risks are, who our audience is, what our strengths are and what our tools are to deal with this,” he said. “We have to find a way to make informing our members a priority.” ▶

Region 3 NBA Michael Caref and Region 7 NBA Troy Fredenburg

Safety and Health: Director of Safety and Health Manuel L. Peralta Jr., Region 1 NBA Bryant Almario, Region 6 NBA Troy Clark and Trustee Mack I. Julion

Contract Administration Unit: Vice President Lew Drass, Region 5 NBA Michael Birkett, Region 14 NBA Richard J. DiCecca and Region 12 NBA David J. Napadano

Uniforms: Assistant Secretary-Treasurer Paul Barner, Region 13 NBA Vada E. Preston and Region 4 NBA Dan Versluis

Innovation and new business: Chief of Staff Jim Sauber (not pictured), Trustee Chairman Larry Brown, Trustee Mike Gill and Region 9 NBA Lynne Pendleton

City Delivery: Director of City Delivery Christopher Jackson, Region 11 NBA Mark Camilli and Region 15 NBA Larry Cirelli

Route structure and adjustment: Director, Health Benefit Plan Stephanie M. Stewart, Region 8 NBA Steve Lassan and Region 10 NBA Javier Bernal

The current agreement between NALC and USPS is set to expire on Sept. 20 at midnight. If the parties fail to reach an agreement by then, federal law establishes a system of mediation and binding arbitration to resolve disputes; the law forbids strikes by postal employees.



News

On the Saturday of the National Conference, four separate workshops were repeated four times so that all attendees could attend each of the trainings.



Where branches have made it a priority, the contribution rates are overwhelming, in branches of all sizes.

“You have to understand how important this is to our craft and to our jobs,” he said.

Other issues

Moving on, Rolando discussed several other issues, including:

- The need for a competent USPS Board of Governors.
- Dealing with Amazon’s entry into the delivery business and preventing the company from driving pay to the bottom.
- Warning branch leaders about self-serving “predators” who seek access to NALC members to give retirement investment advice, and about certain medical groups or attorneys who reward branches for access to members on workers’ compensation claims.
- The creation and expansion of the NALC Disaster Relief Foundation.
- A proposed event to be held next year to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Great Postal Strike of 1970.

After drawing the winning tickets for the Muscular Dystrophy Association raffles, which raised more than \$15,000 over the weekend, Rolando and other members of the Executive Council answered members’ questions.

End of an informative weekend

Throughout the talk, Rolando referenced the workshops held the previous day, which allowed him to expand on other topics. In a new format, all attendees were issued one of four color-coded tickets, which established their

schedule to attend all four workshops. The resident national officers each taught the same class four times, so all attendees could go to each workshop.

The four offerings were:

- Executive Vice President Brian Renfroe, with the assistance of NALC Chief of Staff Jim Sauber and Director of Legislative and Political Affairs Kori Blalock Keller, talked about the collective-bargaining process, NALC’s work in the field on legislative issues and the vote-by-mail initiative.
- Vice President Lew Drass and Director of City Delivery Christopher Jackson, along with Headquarters letter carrier staff members, went into detail on the national-level arbitrations and the ongoing issues with the consolidated casing test and other ill-advised management initiatives.
- Secretary-Treasurer Nicole Rhine, Assistant Secretary-Treasurer Paul Barner and Director of Safety and Health Manuel L. Peralta Jr. dealt with safety issues and with issues affecting branch finance and administration.
- Director, Health Benefit Plan Stephanie Stewart; Director of Retired Members Dan Toth and Director of Life Insurance James “Jim” Yates, along with staff members from the NALC Health Benefit Plan, the Mutual Benefit Association and Headquarters letter carrier staff members, talked about the benefits and offerings of the health and life insurance companies, about issues affecting current and future retirees, and about letter carriers injured on the job. **PR**

NALC Executive Vice President Brian Renfroe led the workshop on collective bargaining and legislative mobilization.

