

Start early and avoid the rush



**Lew
Drass**

As you know, our current National Agreement is set to expire at midnight on Sept. 20. By the time you read this, we will be getting pretty close to that date. So how is all this going to work out? There are three possibilities that I can think of:

1. We reach a negotiated settlement on or before Sept. 20. If that happens, the proposed agreement will be sent out to all active members to review and vote for or against ratification of the proposed agreement.
2. We could proceed directly to mediation/interest arbitration.
3. Negotiations could be extended.

Your guess as to which road will be traveled is as good as mine. However, one thing I can report for certain is that, one way or another, we will achieve a new National Agreement. Another thing I can report is that the local negotiations process will begin again within a few months after we come to terms on a new National Agreement.

One question that comes up whenever we get to the end of the term of a National Agreement is, “What happens on Sept. 21 if we have not reached agreement with the Postal Service?” The answer is that the current provisions of the National Agreement and the USPS handbooks and manuals continue throughout the bargaining process, regardless of which road listed above the parties ultimately take.

The same question comes up about existing local memorandum of understanding (LMOU) provisions. The answer is the same. The current provisions of the LMOU continue throughout bargaining, which includes the local negotiations process.

Negotiating the LMOU for each city in a branch is one of the most important aspects of representation at the local level. Just as every member is directly affected by the terms of our national contract, the same is true with respect to the terms of their LMOU. There are 22 items that can be negotiated, including local vacation planning and other annual leave rules, light-duty provisions, and whether non-scheduled days will be on a fixed or rotating basis.

Preparation is the key to successful negotiations for your local contract (LMOU), and it is not too early to start thinking about this now. You could even go a step or two further than thinking about it at this point.

For instance, the first thing you could do now is review

your current LMOU and evaluate any problems you may have had with any of the existing provisions over the last few years. A good way to do this is to form an LMOU review committee. This group should sit down and take a long look at every provision in your LMOU. You can then decide what your bargaining priorities are for the upcoming round of local negotiations.

The next step of preparation is to consider the views of the active letter carriers regarding the current LMOU in each city your branch represents.

This can be accomplished in many ways, such as sending out a survey, or having discussions at your monthly meetings. If you decide you want to send a survey to your active members, there is a sample survey in the Members Only section of our website that each branch president has access to. The sample survey is in a PDF format so that you can convert the text to a Word format and change the mailing address and questions to fit your needs. Once again, it is not too early to ask the members about certain aspects of the current LMOU.

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If you take these two steps, you will be way ahead of the game when the time comes for the 30-day local negotiation period that all of you will go through. Once we have a National Agreement in place, we will provide training and resources to every branch in the country to assist you with your efforts in the local negotiations process. You also can look for additional guidance in future *Postal Record* articles.

For now, I am reminded of an old saying: “The early bird catches the worm.”