

The role letter carriers play in contract negotiations

In 1970, the Postal Reorganization Act (PRA) was signed into law, granting postal employees the right to bargain collectively for wages, benefits and improved working conditions. Because they did not legally have the right to strike, they were given the right to binding interest arbitration. Should contract negotiations fail, each party presents its case to a three-member arbitration panel—one member named by each party and a third, neutral member selected jointly as board chairman. The panel considers the issues and renders a binding award.

Since the first contract negotiations between NALC and the Postal Service

in 1971, eight contracts were negotiated by the parties and ratified by the membership, and seven contracts were awarded by an arbitration panel. In November, after many months of negotiation, a declared impasse by the two sides, several weeks of testimony and presenting evidence to an interest arbitration panel (all while continuing to negotiate), NALC and the Postal Service reached a tentative agreement on a proposed National Agreement.

The tentative agreement requires majority approval by the membership in the ratification process to become effective. With the ratification process proceeding for the tentative agreement, here is a review of how the union is structured to serve the membership and how the process works.

The *NALC Constitution* sets the governance structure for the national organization, including national officers and local branches. It also contains provisions related to state letter carrier associations, the U.S. Letter Carriers Mutual Benefit Association and the NALC Health Benefit Plan.

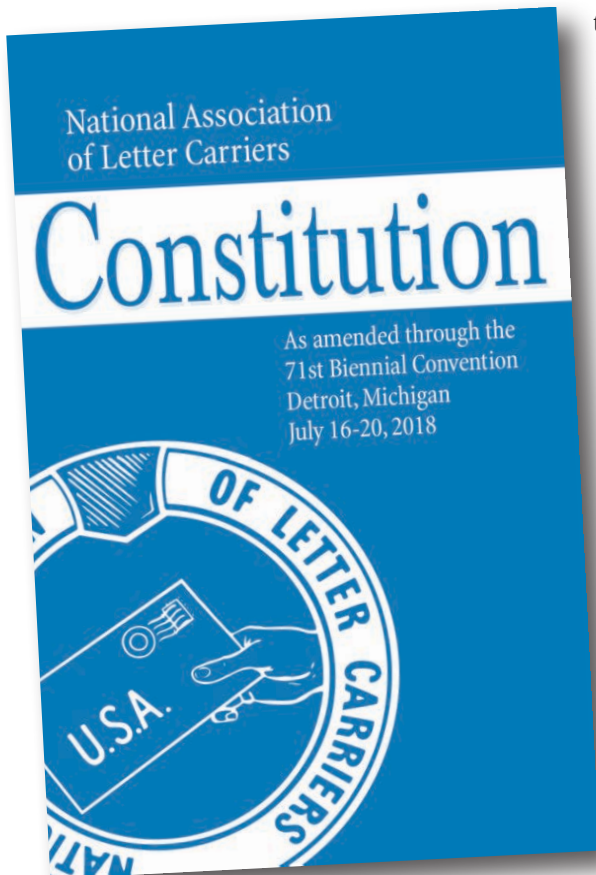
The *NALC Constitution* requires the union to hold a national convention of elected delegates from all of the branches every two years. The convention is the union's supreme governing body. The convention may amend the *Constitution*. In addition to considering amendments, delegates at the convention discuss key issues and set national policy for the union. Convention delegates to every other convention also are

responsible for nominating national officers for election to four-year terms.

The contract, known as the National Agreement, is the “law of the workplace” for letter carriers. It guarantees your wages, hours and working conditions. (“Working conditions” covers a wide range of job-related topics, such as seniority, promotions, job security, and more.) During the biennial convention, NALC branches or state associations may submit resolutions to be considered by convention delegates for potential adoption. Resolutions that are approved by the convention body are then used by NALC in negotiations with the Postal Service on future National Agreements. The recent tentative agreement contains many items that NALC members have submitted as resolutions during past conventions.

While the parties at the national level have agreed to the terms and conditions contained in the tentative agreement, it will not become effective until the membership—you—complete the ratification process contained in the *NALC Constitution*.

Article 16 of the *NALC Constitution* governs the process for ratification of the tentative agreement. This ratification is conducted by mail-in balloting, in which each regular member of the NALC as defined in Article 2, Section 1 (a)—excluding retirees, OWCP departees and non-letter carrier regular members—gets the opportunity to vote. Members must be on the NALC membership roster as of 90 days prior to the date that the tentative agreement was reached to be eligible to receive a ballot. This ballot allows each qualified member to vote for or against the ratification of the proposed agreement. The ballots are then tabulated under the supervi-



sion of a ballot committee composed of 15 members appointed by the national president to oversee the process. These results are then certified by the committee and reported to the membership via one or both of NALC's official publications—*The Postal Record* or the *NALC Bulletin*. Once the membership approves the tentative agreement, it then becomes the “law of the workplace” for city carriers for the covered period.

After the new National Agreement is ratified by the members, a period of local negotiations will take place as well. While most of letter carriers' contractual rights and benefits are negotiated at the national level, some subjects have been left to the local parties to work out according to their own preferences and particular circumstances. These rights and benefits are incorporated by Article 30 of the National Agreement into what is commonly referred to as the “local agreement” or “local memorandum of understanding” (LMOU).

In many local NALC branches, LMOU committees are established to prepare and plan for local negotiations. One of

the functions of these committees is to find out what the members think about their LMOU, what's important to them, and what changes they would like to see. Some branches accomplish this by discussing it at branch meetings or by mailing out a questionnaire. Some engage in a one-on-one canvassing campaign, talking to as many members as possible to get their feedback. However it's done, this input is invaluable to help guide the branch in what the members may or may not want from local negotiations.

NALC is a democratic union, and the message to all letter carriers is: “You are the union.” From the letter carrier national convention delegates who guide NALC's national bargaining positions to local letter carriers who guide their branch leadership in local negotiations, and to every regular member having a say in whether a tentative agreement should be accepted or rejected, letter carriers have a voice in the negotiation and ratification process. **PR**



Please note: There will be no Branch Items, State Summaries or Retiree Reports in the February 2021 edition of *The Postal Record*. That edition will be the special annual tribute issue honoring contributors to LCPF during 2020.