

Parties formally open bargaining talks

The leaders of the National Association of Letter Carriers and the United States Postal Service formally opened negotiations for a new collective-bargaining agreement on Feb. 22, the 16th such event since collective-bargaining rights were achieved with the establishment of USPS in 1971.

In his opening statement, NALC President Brian L. Renfroe told Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, “In this round of collective bargaining, letter carriers have the chance to be recognized, and rewarded, for being the

backbone of this beloved American institution, the United States Postal Service. Letter carriers are the face of the Postal Service. We are the ones customers see delivering to their homes and businesses. They know us and rely on us for dependable, consistent service. We are indispensable and directly carry out the Postal Service’s mission.”

Joining Renfroe for the event—held in the Benjamin Franklin Room at the U.S. Postal Service Headquarters in Washington, DC—were the other members of the NALC Executive Council as well as letter carrier and professional staff from Headquarters and legal counsel. USPS executives and postal headquarters employees joined DeJoy at the Ash Wednesday morning meeting.

Postal Service Deputy Postmaster General Doug Tulino, who serves as the chief human resources officer, kicked off the event, welcoming the leaders of NALC to the bargaining table. “There is one certainty that has existed in each and every round of bargaining that I have participated in, and

NALC President
Brian L. Renfroe



that is that the parties will encounter new and unique challenges to tackle and address,” Tulino said. “This round of bargaining will be no different, but I am confident that we can and we will find mutually acceptable solutions to the challenges we will face in this round of bargaining.”

Tulino, who will lead the negotiations for the Postal Service, said, “As we continue the strategy of becoming the delivery provider of choice for the American public, it is essential that we continue down the path to modernize our work practices and work rules, be more precise in our operational execution, and provide a work environment that enables our employees to provide the best-in-class service—and that includes the safety and security of all of our city letter carriers.”

Executive Vice
President
Paul Barner



NALC President Brian L. Renfroe’s opening remarks for the 2023 collective-bargaining session

FEB. 22, 2023

Good morning, everyone. Thank you, Postmaster General DeJoy and Deputy Postmaster General Tulino, for hosting this opening ceremony for NALC’s 16th round of collective bargaining with the Postal Service. I am honored to be here today representing the nation’s city letter carriers for the first time as NALC president. We are eager to work in good faith to reach a new contract. As we look forward to the negotiations ahead, I see opportunities for both sides of this table.

We meet at a crucial time for the city letter carrier craft. Almost three years ago, the world as we knew it started shutting

down due to the rapidly spreading COVID-19 virus. While millions of Americans worked from home and sheltered in place across the country, our work became a lifeline for millions of homes and businesses.

Letter carriers seamlessly kept the economy and our communities running by delivering essential goods and medications, school supplies, stimulus checks, at-home COVID tests, and everything else that the American people needed. For months, we enabled our customers to safely shelter at home, a luxury that essential workers like letter carriers did not have. We proudly rose to the occasion, just like we always have.

We also helped to uphold American democracy in two national elections by working directly and successfully with the Postal Service to ensure that American voters could safely and confidently cast their ballots at home during a time of intense polarization and heightened congressional scrutiny. During the pandemic, vote-by-mail skyrocketed, and letter carriers



Deputy
Postmaster
General
Doug Tulino



Postmaster
General
Louis DeJoy

He added that USPS's "future success" will depend on "decisions we make relative to maintaining an affordable and flexible workforce capable of responding to a constantly changing business environment where we compete for business every day." Tulino credited letter carriers' ability to adapt through the last three turbulent years.

"Deploying that same ingenuity and adaptability to this round of bargaining will go a long way to us achieving a negotiated agreement," he continued. "As we begin the process of bargaining, I pledge my commitment to working with you, Brian, and your entire

team to achieve a negotiated agreement that is fair to our employees, meets the objectives of both our organizations, and enables us to continue outstanding service to our customers, the American public."

Paul Barner, who as NALC executive vice president serves as the union's chief spokesperson for this round of bargaining, then kicked off NALC's presentation, saying, "We're glad to be here to begin negotiations on our next national agreement with the Postal Service." He thanked the management team for their hospitality and introduced the attendees representing NALC.

President Renfro then gave his statement (printed in full below). The video of the statement is available at nalc.org/cb-opening

Following President Renfro, Postmaster General DeJoy thanked NALC for its cooperation in working with the Postal Service on the issues that have arisen since he became postmaster general. He recounted the accomplishments of the last three years—weathering the COVID-19 pandemic and guaranteeing the delivery of mail ballots during two nationwide elections. He highlighted the procurement of Next Generation Delivery Vehicles and the



The parties met at
USPS Headquarters
on Feb. 22.

and the NALC were proud to play a crucial role in getting tens of millions of ballots delivered securely and on time.

Through all of this, our union and letter carriers across the country led a 12-year effort to finally enact bipartisan postal reform that protected this invaluable network by repealing the pre-funding mandate, which had burdened the Postal Service for over a decade. By achieving this goal, working in concert with you and the other postal unions, we not only put the Postal Service on more solid financial footing, we also demonstrated that productive collaboration is essential to the continued success of our union and the Postal Service.

As everyone knows, our country's economic landscape is drastically different than it was in 2019 when we last sat at a negotiating table. Unemployment rates are at a 50-year low, and we face the increasingly difficult challenge of attracting sufficient applicants for letter carrier jobs at today's starting wages. This has significantly affected our ability to properly

staff post offices and ultimately deliver the nation's mail.

Today, letter carriers are working harder and longer hours than at any other point in our history. The staffing shortages, coupled with the influx of parcel volumes, changing technology and heightened customer expectations, have made our jobs more challenging and demanding.

But that's not all. Too often, we still struggle with the lack of management's contract compliance at the local level. This leads to complications on the workroom floor, which affect morale and productivity, while needlessly costing the Postal Service money.

And perhaps most importantly, crime against letter carriers is on the rise. These repeated attacks against our members are horrific, unacceptable and must be addressed through action. No letter carrier should fear for their life or safety while on the job. Candidly, crime is a deterrent in an already difficult environment to attract letter carriers to join the Postal Service.



Postmaster General Louis DeJoy (l) and NALC President Brian L. Renfro

Bargaining (continued)

to us what we all want and need, a successful path forward in our working relationship as we continue to transform the Postal Service into an organization that will enjoy a vibrant existence far into the future.”

The present collective-bargaining agreement is set to expire at midnight

on May 20. 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 workers. The parties have organized bargaining committees and have begun negotiations.

Future updates on bargaining will be in the *NALC Bulletin*, in *The Postal Record*, on the NALC Member App and on NALC’s social media accounts. **PR**

efforts to streamline the organization’s infrastructure.

“Collective bargaining is an opportunity to address some of our most critical challenges,” he said. “We are better together. We have proven that. Let us jointly focus on how we can reach an agreement that will make the Postal Service stronger than ever with the future of the organization and its people as our main objective.”

DeJoy singled out Renfro and Tulino, saying, “I have the confidence that they will work together to deliver



The NALC Executive Council, along with members of the letter carrier and professional staff, attended the opening.

President Renfro’s opening remarks (continued)

In this round of collective bargaining, letter carriers have the chance to be recognized, and rewarded, for being the backbone of this beloved American institution, the United States Postal Service. Letter carriers are the face of the Postal Service. We are the ones customers see delivering to their homes and businesses. They know us and rely on us for dependable, consistent service. We are indispensable and directly carry out the Postal Service’s mission.

Through a fair agreement, the Postal Service has the opportunity to strengthen the letter carrier workforce, and in turn, bolster the Postal Service’s ability to achieve the goals in its 10-year plan. One of the goals of the 10-year plan is to invest in and empower employees to create a stable workforce. Other key portions of the plan, like implementation of sorting and delivery centers, will only be successful if we use these negotiations to build a stronger city letter carrier craft.

As we seek a new agreement, we will aim to preserve and improve the standard of living for the nation’s city letter carriers, as we always have. It is our expectation that we will be

able to reach voluntary agreement; however, we will not hesitate to pursue a fair agreement through binding interest arbitration if necessary.

Our goals are simple.

First and foremost, we must address the staffing issue that is debilitating our craft. Nationwide, letter carriers are overworked, and post offices are understaffed. One obvious solution that we seek is increased wages. If the Postal Service wants to recruit and retain letter carriers, it starts with a competitive wage—plain and simple.

The staffing crisis can also be addressed by shifting to an all-career workforce and abolishing the city carrier assistant position. The CCA position, in its current form, no longer serves the Postal Service or our craft.

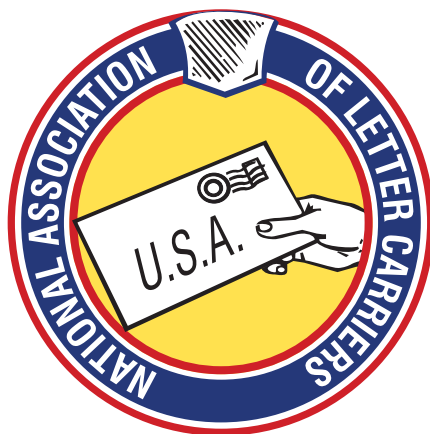
Overwhelming turnover is seriously undermining service. While we have made positive strides in our recent agreements to convert certain installations across the country to the all-career model, NALC seeks to convert all CCAs to career positions and make the all-career model the standard nationwide.

NALC's 50-plus years of bargaining

The wages, benefits and working conditions of the nation's city letter carriers never have simply been given—they've been forged at the bargaining table, through negotiation and sometimes through arbitration.

More than 50 years ago, President Richard Nixon, using the momentum created by the Great Postal Strike of 1970, signed the Postal Reorganization Act (PRA) into law, replacing the 195-year-old Cabinet-level Post Office Department with a new public corporation: the United States Postal Service.

With the strike and the PRA, postal employees had finally won the right to bargain collectively for wages, benefits and improved working conditions. Rather than a right to strike, the law said that they had a right to binding interest arbitration: Should contract negotiations fail, each party presents its case to a three-member arbitration board—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 judgment.

The first two-year national agreement, settled in 1971, was negotiated between USPS and all seven postal unions of the time, which bargained together. The agreement included negotiated wage increases as well as

staggered cost-of living adjustments (COLAs) to wages based on the consumer price index.

The 1973 and 1975 contracts also were negotiated by the now four consolidated unions: NALC, the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), the National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU) and the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association (NRLCA).

When the 1975 agreement reached its end in 1978, USPS attacked the COLA provision, arguing a need for protection from inflation-driven pay raises. Initially, NALC, APWU and NPMHU agreed to a proposed limit on COLAs. But rank-and-file city letter carriers, for the first and only time, rejected the proposed contract in a national ratification vote. The rejection forced the COLA issue, as well as proposed changes in the prior contract's prohibition of layoffs (the "no-layoff clause"), into arbitration. In the end, the arbitrator sided with the union on the cap,

Lastly, we will insist on practical solutions to address the increasing crime against letter carriers. The safety of letter carriers is our No. 1 priority. We must work together to ensure that letter carriers are safe from the moment they arrive at their stations until the moment they park their vehicles after delivery. We cannot allow these crimes to persist.

If we work together, I wholeheartedly believe that we can achieve these goals and that doing so will ultimately benefit both parties. Together, we have implemented several successful initiatives since our last agreement, including numerous COVID-related memorandums of understanding, the development of the New Employee Experience and Retention Program, the conversion to the all-career model in hundreds of installations across the country, and the Technology Integrated Alternate Route Evaluation and Adjustment Process, just to name a few.

We commend your willingness to work with us on these key initiatives. We have long been involved in the bargaining process with Deputy Postmaster General Tulino. I appreciate your commitment and look forward to what we will continue to accomplish together.

Similarly, after years and years of declining service quality,

it is refreshing to have leadership that is willing to sit down and maintain regular, substantive engagement to address this problem while promoting the work letter carriers do proudly six—and sometimes seven—days a week. Your leadership, Postmaster General DeJoy, has fostered that engagement that we look forward to continuing in the future.

I will close by saying, during these negotiations, I believe both parties have a unique opportunity to build something transformative for the nation's letter carrier workforce and the entire agency. If we can increase wages, appropriately staff our craft, address safety concerns, and enforce managerial contract compliance, letter carriers, in turn, can ensure that the Postal Service remains strong and competitive.

City letter carriers deserve a contract that will enable them to have a dignified, safe and dependable job that provides a comfortable middle-class working life and retirement. It is my privilege to lead the nation's city letter carriers in our pursuit of these goals.

Again, NALC is committed to doing all we can to swiftly reach agreement on a mutually beneficial contract. I look forward to working with all of you in the weeks and months ahead. Thank you. **PR**

50-plus years of bargaining (continued)

retaining the existing COLA clause, but he granted management a modification of the no-layoff clause—limiting its coverage to career employees with at least six years of service.

Between 1981 and 1994, NALC and APWU bargained jointly with USPS. The 1981 agreement was successfully negotiated, although the Postal Service began claiming that employees were overpaid compared with private-sector workers in similar jobs.

Three years later, the 1984 contract talks reached an impasse when USPS revived the “comparability” issue. In interest arbitration, the board rejected USPS’s demands for massive wage cuts but lowered the starting salaries of NALC and APWU members, calling for “moderate restraint” in future negotiations.

The 1987 agreement was negotiated, while concerns surrounding comparability and health insurance premiums forced the 1990 contract to arbitration. That arbitrator provided wage increases and maintained COLAs, but created a transitional employee (TE) classification to facilitate the implementation of delivery point sequence (DPS) automation. The arbitrator agreed that USPS deserved relief on health insurance contributions, but told the parties to try to reach an agreement on that issue through mediation. Those talks failed, and in 1993, a second arbitrator’s award cut the Postal Service’s contribution toward health benefits 1 percent per year for five years.

NALC’s 1994 national convention in Atlantic City, NJ, decided that the union should “go it alone” in contract negotiations. In 1994 and 1998, USPS again raised the comparability issue; in both years, talks went to arbitration, with NALC raising its own concerns over the impact of automation—

specifically DPS—on carrier productivity, injury rates and street times.

Also in 1994, NALC pushed for a significant pay upgrade based on changes in letter carriers’ work. The arbitrator did not grant the increase, but wrote in the final award that the union had raised an important issue that needed to be addressed in the future. The arbitrator also rejected the Postal Service’s claim that letter carriers were overpaid.

In 1998, after extensive hearings, letter carriers finally won their sought-after pay upgrade in recognition of the increasingly difficult nature of their work—a devastating blow to USPS’s “comparability” arguments.

The Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the postal anthrax attacks shortly thereafter delayed completion of the 2001 contract talks until the spring of 2002. The negotiated agreement covered five years—a first—and included wage increases and COLAs; it also overhauled the grievance/arbitration procedure by incorporating the Dispute Resolution Process into Article 15.

In 2006, NALC was unrelenting in its push for protection from the Postal Service’s increased use of contracted out delivery services. Negotiations dragged on for months and arbitration seemed likely. Meanwhile, NALC pressed Congress for protection from contracting out. Eventually, postal management conceded on the issue and another five-year agreement was negotiated, finalized and ratified by a 9-to-1 ratio. That agreement secured the protections against subcontracting that still cover us today.

Following 14 months of negotiations and mediation, the 2011-2016 agreement was settled in January 2013 through interest arbitration. The TE

classification was replaced with the new non-career classification known as city carrier assistant (CCA).

The 2016-2019 agreement took 15 months to negotiate. It included many gains, including a pay upgrade, COLAs and general wage increases. It also included provisions affecting CCAs and former CCAs, notably a one-time conversion affecting certain CCAs as well as advanced step placements and step increases for CCAs and former CCAs with significant TE service. It was ratified by a 16-to-1 ratio.

In 2020, the negotiations for a new agreement were well into the arbitration process—a process forced to operate remotely through video conference by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic—when the parties came to agreement in November of that year. The 2019-2023 agreement provided four annual general wage increases and seven COLAs. In addition, a new top step (Step P) was added to the career letter carrier pay scales. The agreement provided for the automatic conversion of CCAs to career status no later than after 24 months of relative standing, providing full fringe benefits and peace of mind to non-career carriers. It also maintained existing protections against subcontracting and layoffs. NALC members overwhelmingly approved of the agreement by more than 95 percent.

The current contract expires at midnight on May 20, and the bargaining process already is underway. More than 50 years after the Great Postal Strike, NALC and USPS still have faith that bargaining-table compromises are the best means toward crafting a contract agreement that serves the interests of city letter carriers and the Postal Service. **PR**