

# It's not *their* money



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Julion**

**A few months ago, I found myself** in a rather uncomfortable situation. I was sitting at a table gathering up the moving violations I'd accumulated since moving to Washington, DC. I needed to pay up if I didn't want the fines to double. Not since I moved to the western suburbs of Chicago more than 10 years ago had I paid for so many tickets—mainly because those payments at that time served as a deterrent to my driving behavior. Now, once again after paying these newly acquired fines, I have adjusted my driving to a city that is inundated with speed cameras in areas that are restricted to a pal-

try 25 mph limit. Whether or not I agree with the limit is irrelevant; those are the rules, and if I don't follow them, there are consequences. Costly consequences.

**I start my article with that personal analogy because** those of us who deal with postal managers on a daily basis see how their total disregard for our collective-bargaining agreements comes at a cost to our employer. In fact, I am convinced that their callous neglect and refusal to comply with our contracts reflects the fact that the money that is paid on grievance settlements does not come out of the pockets of the offenders. There is no personal impact on them, and this "cost of doing business" doesn't involve *their* money. So, individually or collectively, there is no real financial deterrent to get them to change their actions. I have been representing letter carriers for more than 20 years now at every level of our union, and unfortunately, this is not a new revelation for me.

I wrote about this in our local newsletter years ago. One of our former postmasters in Chicago did attempt to pass the bill on to those reprobates in management who were costing our company so much money. The supervisors and managers received "letters of demand" for their wanton violations. I was later informed that the National Association of Postal Supervisors put an end to that idea. This appears to have further emboldened the supervisors and managers, and it's obvious that this fiduciary recklessness is acceptable throughout the organization. Instead of addressing the issue of bad management, it is easier to point the finger at the postal unions and blame

our representatives for "making them pay" for their repetitive violations. They will tell you that the problem isn't their management team—it's because "your union is on a money grab" or seeking "undue riches" that will eventually bankrupt the Postal Service. That's like me blaming the District of Columbia for installing speeding cameras to enhance their budget. There would be no issue if I weren't speeding.

**A few years ago, as branch president in Chicago, I made** a very intentional decision that we would seek remedies to the branch for every non-compliance or repetitive grievance that we had to pursue, along with the monetary remedy for the grievant. I figured that if they had to pay the grievant *and* the union, it would get their attention, and someone would surely put a stop to these repeated violations. I mocked them for growing our building fund and upgrading the speaker system and the newly installed LED lights in our union hall due to their "generosity," but they didn't stop. Article 8 grievances (overtime), unwarranted emergency placements, non-compliances and simply not providing requested information were the most common forms of these blatant violations. Ultimately, these grievances would make it to arbitration because of the escalating remedies that were requested, practically begging them to stop the violations and adhere to our contracts.

Well, arbitrators are not going to beg. They intend for their rulings to be obeyed. But again, they are dealing with postal management.

Finally, we received consecutive awards that provided automatic remedies to the branch whenever there was a contractual violation or non-compliance, in addition to the monetary remedy provided for the grievant. One award mandated contract compliance training for *all* executive and administrative schedule employees (EAS) in the Chicago installation *and* provided \$2,000 to the branch whenever information was not provided. The other penalized them \$2,500, payable to the branch for *any* non-compliance.

The arbitrator informed the Postal Service that the branch was not at fault for seeking such remedies. Its payment for each offense was akin to it being in "contempt of court" and it had the power to stop it at any time. More than \$5 million has been paid to the branch in the last two years, and yet the Postal Service has not been deterred!

For years our members have viewed the remedies received for overtime grievances as "free money" stemming from management's inability to manage. Apparently, the money is *free* to managers too, because as of this writing, they have not stopped the violations.