Article 25 (continued)

(continued from previous page)

When a carrier technician (T-6) is absent for an extended period and another employee serves the series of 5 routes assigned to the absent T-6, the replacement employee shall be considered as replacing the T-6, and shall be paid at the T-6 level of pay for the entire time he or she serves those routes, whether or not he or she performs all of the duties of the T-6. When a carrier technician's absence is of sufficiently brief duration so that his replacement does not serve the full series of routes assigned to the absent T-6, the replacement employee is not entitled to the T-6 level of pay. In addition, when a T-6 employee is on extended absence, but different carriers serve the different routes assigned to the T-6, those replacements are not entitled to the T-6 level of pay. The foregoing should be implemented in a straightforward and equitable manner. Thus, for example, an employee who has carried an absent T-6 carrier's routes for four days should not be replaced by another employee on the fifth day merely to avoid paying the replacement higher-level pay.

Management has an obligation to fill temporarily vacant carrier technician positions when requested via Article 25 by a qualified career letter carrier. National Arbitrator Snow held in C-10254, Sept. 10, 1990, that management may not assign different employees on an "as needed" basis to carry a route on a T-6 string when a vacancy of five or more days is involved; instead, such vacancies must be filled according to Article 25. While CCAs are not eligible for higher-level pay under Article 25, CCAs can be administratively assigned by management to vacant carrier technician assignments. When this occurs, the CCA's PS Form 50, Notification of Personnel Action must be revised to reflect that they are assigned to a carrier technician position.

City carriers with questions about Article 25, higher-level pay or filling temporarily vacant carrier technician assignments should contact their shop steward or branch officer.

Staff Reports

The rising cost of health care

Chief of Staff
Kori Blalock Keller

Everything is more expensive—food, housing, higher education, essentials and health care. Kitchen table issues were at the center of the 2024 elections, where voters ultimately aligned with GOP's focus on the subject, while the Democrats focused on social and human rights issues. No matter your views on politics, the result has been a trifecta of Republican control of both houses of Congress, the White House and an ultra-conservative Supreme Court. This has resulted in kitchen table issues, such as health care, coming center stage.

As this article was going to print, the government was on its 27th day of a shutdown, the second longest in our nation's history with no end in sight—even if a short-term funding deal were to miraculously come to fruition—another funding battle is all but guaranteed to follow. At the center of the shutdown was the expiration of Affordable Care Act (ACA) subsidies at the end of 2025 for the millions of Americans purchasing their health insurance on healthcare.gov. As a result, insurance premiums are expected to rise between 18 and 25 percent for those individuals and their families.

While ACA subsidies may not be relevant to the everyday lives of letter carriers, health care costs are rising significantly across the board. In fact, 154 million Americans that have health care coverage through their employer will see rising costs.

In this month's President's Message, President Renfroe discusses our own NALC Health Benefit Plan. While it will continue providing the best coverage at the lowest possible premiums for letter carriers and other postal employees, recent regulations from OPM led to the Plan's decision to no longer offer coverage to other federal employees. The Plan remains focused on maintaining excellent benefits without additional financial burden at a time where every dollar matters at home.

The issue of health care—whether its coverage or costs—isn't going away, and the most recent standoff in Congress further illustrates the fragile economic situation in this country. Simply said, everything is expensive and it's coming to a head.