

Bargaining power and fighting like hell to protect it



Brian L. Renfro

Last month was a powerful reminder of NALC's collective-bargaining power. On Aug. 29, letter carriers received full retroactive back pay that was included in the Nolan Award. More information on back pay and what it covered is on page 4.

For many of our new members, this is their first time receiving back pay. With that in mind, it's worth noting that back pay is not guaranteed. NALC fought like hell to get it included in the Nolan Award. Unsurprisingly, USPS typically asks arbitrators to reject retroactivity. In fact, in the 2013 Das Award, NALC's last contract settled in interest arbitration before the Nolan Award,

we didn't receive back pay. Other contracts in past years have reduced back pay by paying cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) through lump sums. Looking at previous rounds of negotiations and interest arbitrations, we knew we'd have to fight for the full back pay we deserve. The fight paid off, and letter carriers now have full back pay in their pockets.

NALC is moving full steam ahead, preparing for next year's collective-bargaining negotiations. The Executive Council met at NALC Headquarters in August to begin forming bargaining committees. These committees, which cover a variety of topics in the National Agreement, are made up of Executive Council members and NALC Headquarters staff.

These committees are, and always have been, a crucial part of our bargaining efforts. Bargaining committees meet regularly to review NALC's official bargaining positions, which have been set at each NALC national convention since 1970. The committee members combine their own experience with these official positions to create proposals that will be submitted during negotiations. These committees create a diverse and collaborative approach to collective bargaining, and they are something that our union has used for years. When the committees are finalized, a full list of committee members will be published in *The Postal Record* and on nalc.org.

In mid-September, a few dozen rank-and-file letter carriers from all over the country will spend nearly a week in the Washington, DC, area to provide their valuable insight and input during our bargaining preparation. We are conduct-

ing surveys and polling NALC members in multiple ways on collective-bargaining topics and priorities. Further opportunities will be available for all members to participate this fall.

I am personally appreciative of our members' input and opinions on our bargaining priorities and process. Many of them come through calls or letters to NALC Headquarters or our social media channels. Others come from the regional trainings, state conventions and branch events I am privileged to attend all over the country throughout the year.

In November, NALC will hold a national rap session in Cleveland, OH. Branch and state leaders from all over the country will attend. By the time the rap session takes place, a substantial amount of collective-bargaining preparation as I've described here in this month's column will be completed. We intend to utilize a significant amount of time at the rap session to have productive collective-bargaining discussion with all of our union's leadership in anticipation of officially opening negotiations in February 2026.

While we can't predict the exact landscape we'll enter into when negotiations begin next year, we know what we'll be fighting for. An all-career workforce, further improving pay for all letter carriers at every step, defending and improving our COLA clause, defending the ban on contracting out our work, and defending layoff protections will be top priorities, consistent with the official bargaining positions of NALC.

As we continue to prepare for collective bargaining, we must remember that we never take our right to bargain for granted. We must be ready to fight like hell to defend our right to bargain at all times. In 2025, we have seen attacks on our brother and sister federal employees and their unions that are unprecedented in American history. Most recently, the Department of Veterans Affairs terminated all collective-bargaining agreements with its employees, affecting more than 350,000 public servants. They are civil servants, just like us. We stand in solidarity with these fellow public servants in their fight for their rights, and we stand always ready to fight like hell like to defend ours.

Thankfully, our collective action and unified message have been successful at stopping each and every threat to the Postal Service and to us thus far. We've had to fight back the administration's intentions to ruin USPS and attempts in Congress to gut our retirement benefits as part of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act that passed this summer. More threats will come, but letter carriers have more fight than whoever tries to attack us next.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brian L. Renfro'.