

Independence Day?



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Drass**

Today is July 4, which marks our country's 244th birthday. This year is different than any I can remember. We have closed beaches, bars, restaurants and/or inside dining all around the country. There are fewer and smaller backyard barbecues and fewer fireworks displays. It will be a very quiet holiday for many of us this year.

I am sitting in front of the keyboard enjoying a nice beverage and thinking about all the great Fourth of July parties I hosted or attended over the years. The craziest Fourth of July I ever had was the bicentennial in 1976. I was 16 and went down to the National Mall for the celebration. They provided free bus service

all day (this was before DC had a subway system). I decided to take advantage of the word "free" and avoid the hassle of parking, so I got on a bus and headed downtown.

Talk about a crowd. This place was packed. It was a wild day and the fireworks display was great, but the crazy part was yet to come. When the event was over and it was time to get back on a bus, we discovered that the knuckleheads at Metro Bus did not plan to have enough buses available to take folks home. After a while, when a bus showed up, people would all crowd around it and literally start rocking it back and forth out of frustration. I got home at about 5 o'clock in the morning. So what does all this have to do with anything? Hopefully nothing, but I am concerned that Postal Service management will be just as short-sighted when implementing the national settlement (M-01923) on the Consolidated Casing test as the folks at Metro Bus were back in 1976.

One of the elements this national settlement covers is how the grievances that occurred during the test will be handled. M-01923 states in relevant part:

The issue in this case is whether the testing of Consolidated Casing is permissible under Article 34 or otherwise violates the collective bargaining agreement. The parties agree to the following resolution of this matter, as follows:

7. Grievances related to the Case Consolidation Test pending at any step of the Dispute Resolution Process as of the date of this settlement or future grievances not resolved at Formal Step A will be sent directly to the appropriate NALC NBAs and USPS AMLRs, or their designees. The parties at the area/regional level will jointly determine if such grievances will be closed as a result of this resolution or processed.

We have about 6,000 grievances that were filed during the test so far. Half of the 62 sites around the country will continue with the Consolidated Casing test until around the end of the year, making grievances harder to resolve. Unfortunately, four of the five sites that have the most grievances pending will continue with the test. Management obviously did not consider this situation when it chose the 31 sites that will end the test by July 31. Makes me feel like I am waiting for a bus that is not coming anytime soon.

When it comes to resolving these grievances, there is some previous direction. The national parties settled a similar case in 2006 (M-01567) by stating in relevant part:

The parties agree that data collection and testing conducted pursuant to the Delivery Redesign initiative did not result in any changes to current work measurement systems or work or time standards. More generally, the parties further agree that a test conducted pursuant to Article 34 does not modify provisions of the National Agreement, including handbooks, manuals and published regulations incorporated through Article 19, beyond the scope of the new work measurement system or work or time standard being tested.

This is the direction that the NALC national business agents and USPS area managers of labor relations, or their designees, should follow. We shall see.

On another note, we have decided to cancel our Formal A and Beyond training classes that were scheduled for Sept. 13-18 and Nov. 15-20. With the way the COVID-19 pandemic is going, I just do not see how we could have 80 participants inside a classroom for a week, much less ask them to travel back and forth across the country.

We want to give the Maritime Institute as much opportunity as possible to fill the dates we are canceling, so it makes no sense to wait any longer to cancel. As reported last month, branches that have already sent in their money will be fully refunded. You can expect a refund soon if you do not already have it.

We also had an Arbitration Advocate training class scheduled for Oct. 25-31. This class has just 16 participants, but once again, we have the same concerns as above. Therefore, we have decided to cancel this class as well.

We will start looking at 2021 if the Maritime Institute is willing to waive cancellation fees again and go from there. Perhaps there will be a vaccine by then, or at least things will be better than they are now. In the meantime, stay safe out there.