

# Our fight on multiple fronts



**Brian L.  
Renfro**

**L**ast month, Arbitrator Dennis R. Nolan issued an interest arbitration award, setting the terms for our 2023-2026 National Agreement. Official sessions were held on March 17 and 18, and between what was presented in those days and what Arbitrator Nolan had heard over nine days in 2020, he formulated his decision promptly.

Over the years, the arbitration process has seen many different forms, given the varying circumstances. This year, NALC and USPS agreed on a process that was very similar to the process in 1978, the last time a tentative agreement was rejected.

This accelerated process was adopted in reaction to the political peril we face. Our arbitration took place just days after the administration canceled the American Federation of Government Employees' collective-bargaining agreement with the Transportation Security Administration and while the administration was reportedly contemplating an executive order to fire the USPS Board of Governors and to move the Postal Service into the Department of Commerce to facilitate postal privatization.

Just after the award was issued, President Trump issued another executive order to end collective bargaining at most other federal agencies. Having a contract in place strengthens NALC's ability to protect our collective-bargaining rights in federal court if need be.

The award includes new economic provisions, including the largest pay increase since our 2006 National Agreement, and full back pay. Notably, no givebacks were awarded to USPS, and this process resulted in more achieved official bargaining positions as voted for by NALC's convention delegates than any agreement in our modern bargaining history.

The new pay chart is now available (see page 8), and new pay rates are expected to go into effect on April 19. The date new rates go into effect will also end the back pay period. The Postal Service estimates that back pay payments will be released in August. Task force work is already underway to ensure a smooth implementation process and address our priorities like postal management's rampant non-compliance with our contract and addressing the poor work environments that letter carriers are subjected to in some locations.

The circumstances in which we bargained and ultimately received an arbitration award were unlike any in our union's history. It presented some long-standing challenges we were

familiar with and some new ones that created even more difficulties. NALC's steadfast commitment to achieving the best results was the one constant. I want to thank every executive council and staff member who assisted in this round of collective bargaining and the arbitration process. And I'd like to thank our members for their patience as we continuously fought for the best possible outcome for letter carriers.

I understand some members are frustrated by the time it took to enact a new contract and may even be disappointed with the outcome. With this in mind, I urge every member to consider the challenges we face.

Since 1987, only one contract has been completed before its expiration. In the most recent rounds of negotiations, it has taken more than a year after the contract's expiration to secure a new one. Why? Because we don't negotiate with a private company bringing in billions of dollars in profits. We are employed by a non-taxpayer-funded government agency that has been financially crippled by congressional policies (postage price caps, onerous pre-funding mandates, unfair pension rules, etc.) that make bargaining very difficult. While unfortunate and obviously unfair, this is the reality for our employer, and that's why we have to keep fighting like hell to enact these policy changes.

Page 4 has more details about the award and implementation.

**With our contract finalized, more battles still lie ahead.** Threats of privatization, uncertainties over the future of USPS leadership, a challenging political landscape, the increase in crime and assaults targeting our members, our legislative priorities, and more will continue to shape our union's work in the months ahead.

Every day an executive order related to the Postal Service isn't issued is a victory for us. This success is attributable to our union's nationwide efforts and unified message. Others in the industry are leaning on us. The mailers, our sister unions, and everyone with a stake in protecting USPS are looking to NALC. Our strong bipartisan relationships on Capitol Hill and across the federal government are key to fending off these attacks, but our most valuable tool is our energized and engaged membership.

Now, more than ever, is the time to unite. We all have the same goals: to protect our jobs, our retirements, and the future of USPS. It's time to come together and activate ourselves in a way that only NALC members know how, time to channel all our efforts and energy into fighting for our futures.

While it's impossible to predict the future and, based on reporting, it can feel like things shift hour by hour, I am certain that the only way through these challenging times is together. Differing messages and priorities will only hurt our shared objectives. It's time to put all differences aside and fight like hell. We can't be stopped with all 295,000 NALC members in the fight.