

A RATIFIED CONTRACT, UNION DUES AND HEALTHCARE:

LET'S TALK MONEY

Michael J. Hora, National Secretary-Treasurer



The coronavirus pandemic has disrupted the economy and life as we know it. COVID-19 has contributed to the death of four active mail handlers, hundreds more have tested positive or are presumed positive, and the volume of positive cases are trending up. I am deeply saddened by this loss of life. We will continue to take necessary steps to mitigate the spread. Representatives of the NPMHU are on call to meet with the USPS at all levels of the organization daily to discuss abatement control measures and operational concerns, and to address issues that arise as a result of the pandemic. We will continue to disseminate relevant information to the Local Unions, and to post resources at the COVID-19 hot topics tab at npmhu.org.

Because of the pandemic, the National Executive Board made the decision to postpone the 2020 spring Semi-Annual Meeting of the Local Unions (SAMLU) and the NPMHU 2020 quadrennial Convention. The NPMHU was able to adapt and bring representatives together remotely to conduct the first ever virtual SAMLU meeting in April. However, a virtual Convention is another story altogether. Out of an abundance of concern for all delegates, guests, and staff, postponing the convention was the correct thing to do; the Convention is now set to begin on March 29, 2021 in Denver, CO. Because of this postponement, the timeline for submission of any constitutional amendments or resolutions is also extended. All submissions must now be received at the National Office no later than Thursday, January 28, 2021, which is sixty days prior to the rescheduled opening of the 2020 National Convention. Some coronavirus adaptations are simple, it is easy to cancel a meeting or delay a convention. But never forget, the real work is being performed by the front-line workers, including our mail handlers.

The coronavirus pandemic also affected ratification of the 2019 National Agreement. The ballot verification and count initially scheduled for March 23, 2020 was postponed until early April in part because the original count and verification service was unable to perform the terms of its contract. They understandably refused to travel to Washington, DC as the pandemic escalated. The National Executive Board was forced to abruptly modify ratification procedures to accommodate social distancing requirements, enabling the verification and

count to occur simultaneously in four separate locations with remote observation on the actual count. The terms of the 2019 National Agreement between the NPMHU and the U.S. Postal Service were officially ratified on April 7, 2020, when the results of the membership ratification vote were certified by the replacement election service, True Ballot Inc. The final vote tally was 7,003 in favor of ratification and 255 in opposition, meaning that 96.49% of the voting membership voted yes on ratification.

Now comes the task of implementing the terms of the 2019 agreement. President Hogrogian's overview in the preceding pages highlights terms and conditions of a new contract that include four wage increases, a continuation of cost of living allowances, the elimination of casuals, improvements to MHAs health benefits and no significant concessions. Contract Administration Department Manager Teresa Harmon touches on some of the contractual implications in her article beginning on page 28 and I will focus on the financial and technical components.

The timing of this round of bargaining, which started in June 2019, could not have been predicted. At its end, the COVID-19 pandemic was strangling the world economy and the Trump Administration's appointment of a new Postmaster General should have given even the most casual observer reason for concern. Given our economic and political circumstances, the terms of this contract were worthy of swift approval. A draft version of the 2019 National Agreement is posted and available for download at npmhu.org. The print version is in final review with a union printer and will be mailed to each dues paying member in the coming weeks.

The implementation of these contract changes has proven to test the resources and administrative capabilities of the Postal Service. The Service is faced with initiating a retroactively effective general wage increase to November 23, 2019 and correlating dues increase of one dollar per pay period, a retroactively effective COLA increase to February 29, 2020, and implementation of several iterations of MHA health benefit improvements including the timing of one's entitlement to the newly negotiated USPS non-career plan contributions of 65% for Self Plus One enrollment and 75% for Family

enrollment effective upon one's reappointment to a second term, and the right to apply these same dollar benefits to the (FEHB) Mail Handler Benefit Plan's Consumer or Value Plan options. As of now, the Postal Service is not expected to make payment on retroactive wage increases until October 2020. There is also much consternation over the implementation of MHA health benefits as shown by the filing of several National level grievances.

Specifically, the Postal Service has refused to implement the new health insurance rates for those MHAs either already participating in the self plus one or family coverage options of the USPS Noncareer Health Care Plan as of April 25, 2020, or for those MHAs who chose to participate after that date upon their eligibility for the plan because of, for example, a reappointment date or a qualifying life event occurring on or after April 25, 2020. Instead, the Postal Service only plans to conduct an open season for this plan in July and August 2020, with an effective date of August 1, 2020.

Additionally, the Postal Service has refused to implement the new employee contribution rates for those MHAs who, after an initial appointment for a 360-day term, chose to participate in the self plus one or family coverage options in the MHBP Value Plan or the MHBP Consumer Option. Instead, the Postal Service only plans to participate in the OPM open season for these plans in November and December 2020, which only makes these rates effective in January 2021 and is not sufficient under the National Agreement. To that point, the USPS recently initiated a mailing to all eligible MHAs entitled *HEALTH BENEFITS ENROLLMENT OPPORTUNITY — DEADLINE APPLIES* in which the Postal Service promotes a special enrollment period for the noncareer plan only. It bears noting that this special enrollment opportunity was unilaterally established and then modified by the USPS; the USPS initially proposed a special enrollment opportunity to begin in early June. This is also addressed in the national level grievance. Moreover, this recent enrollment notice only offers information specific to the USPS Health Benefits Plan. The USPS does not provide FEHB rates for the newly negotiated access to the MHBP Consumer Option or the MHBP Value Plan. The USPS does, however, acknowledge that those MHAs currently enrolled in self plus one or family coverage will see reduced premiums in the paycheck received on July 24, 2020. We continue to discuss this matter with the Postal Service in pursuit of full resolution.

Finally, a word about union dues. As required by Article XIV, Section 3 of the National Constitution, each time that

Mail Handlers receive a general negotiated or arbitrated wage increase, the dues for each Local's regular members shall be increased by one dollar (\$1.00) per pay period, of which amount twenty cents (\$.20) shall be deducted by the National Office as increased per capita tax. Article XIV also directs that the dues and per capita tax increase shall go into effect as soon as possible after the effective date of each general negotiated or arbitrated wage increase. Please note that, because of programming workload, the Postal Data Center (PDC) in Eagan, MN is unable to process the NPMHU dues increase until PP19-2020. The current schedule calls for the PDC to first withhold this one dollar (\$1.00) membership dues increase during PP19-2020, with retroactive collection back to PP25-2019 (when the wage increase takes effect). The retroactive amount for the dues increase will total \$21.00 (one dollar per pay period covering each of the twenty-one pay periods from PP25-2019 thru PP 19-2020). This retroactive amount is expected to be withheld from regular members' payroll during PP19-2020, reflected in paychecks issued on September 18, 2020. In the next pay period, PP20-2020, the bi-weekly dues will revert back to the regular amount which will then be \$26.00 for most locals.

I will wrap it up with a comment on the upcoming Presidential elections. It is imperative that every mail handler register and vote in the upcoming election. Equally important, we should all embrace voting by mail. I will not comment on the divisive, racist, antagonistic, egotistical, or narcissistic nature of the sitting President. Rather, I will call your attention to his direct impact on mail handlers, our paycheck, our benefits, and the very existence of your ability to earn a living with the USPS. If President Trump secures a second term, we may be remembered as the ones that used to work for the Postal Service before it was broken up, privatized, and sold off. I am calling on all mail handlers to vote your paycheck. As a union leader, my primary consideration is the existence and solvency of the United States Postal Service. Be a single-issue voter and support the candidate that does not want to dismantle the USPS.

In Unity,



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