

COMMITTEE ON THE FUTURE OF THE NATIONAL POSTAL MAIL HANDLERS UNION

JANUARY 2014

Since 1996, when it was created by the National Executive Board, the Committee on the Future of the NPMHU has continued to meet on a semi-annual basis in order to engage in long-range planning and strategic thinking for the Union and all mail handlers employed by the U.S. Postal Service. The Committee usually focuses on five key issues facing the NPMHU: privatization of the Postal Service; the NPMHU's legislative relations program; USPS automation and other technological changes; financial planning, especially at the Local level; and membership recruitment.

The current members of the Committee include all members of the NEB and Local Union Presidents Ernie Grijalva of Local 302, Anthony Davis of Local 314, David Jarvis of Local 315, Nick Mosezar of Local 318, and J.R. Macon of Local 329.

At its most recent three-day meeting in January, although the Committee discussed all of the major issues on its agenda, it used most of its time to focus on several extremely important topics:

1. The Committee first addressed the special needs and demands of newly-hired Mail Handler Assistants (MHAs). More than 5,500 MHAs have been hired into the mail handler craft since early April 2013. Of those new employees, almost 200 have been converted to full-time regular employees within the mail handler craft, and that number is growing each and every pay period.

At earlier meetings, the Committee spent a considerable amount of time and effort writing and revising materials that were then circulated to the Local Unions as a guide for attending and presenting orientation programs for newly hired MHAs. At this most recent meeting, the Committee reviewed the results of those efforts, and discussed detailed information from each Local Union to determine precisely where membership numbers for MHAs are lagging behind the recent upsurge in hiring.

The Committee also discussed the need to develop written materials for circulation directly to MHAs that would be focused on their rights and benefits under the National Agreement, including their right to be converted to career employment under cer-

tain circumstances. Those materials are now being prepared by the National Office, and should be ready for distribution soon.

The National Office also is using the preparation of these MHA materials to identify open or disputed questions concerning MHAs, which the National Office then will be able to present and seek joint clarification with the Postal Service. Alternatively, as these issues are identified but remain unresolved, the National Office will be able to file contractual disputes in the grievance-arbitration process or prepare proposals for the next round of National negotiations.

2. The Committee also expended a considerable amount of its meeting time discussing and analyzing recent legislative developments in the U.S. Congress. There has been a tremendous amount of legislative activity with regard to postal reform over the past few months, and indeed there has been significant action in the Senate Committee during the weeks since the meeting of the Committee on the Future. The most recent developments will be discussed at the upcoming meeting of the Semi-Annual Meeting of the Local Unions.

Here are some highlights: As reported in the popular press, if unmade payments to the Retiree Health Benefits Fund (RHBF) are counted, then the Postal Service lost another \$5 billion in the year ending September 30, 2013, and will continue to lose money this year. But without counting the RHBF liabilities, the Postal Service had an operational surplus of several hundred million dollars in Fiscal Year 2013, and is projecting a \$1 billion surplus in the current fiscal year. Thus, although there remain financial and strategic pressures on the Postal Service, there are many more anti-USPS, anti-union, and anti-postal employee forces in the Congress than ever could be justified by the financial realities.

In both the House and the Senate, the full Committees with jurisdiction over the Postal Service have both passed postal reform bills, H.R. 2748 and S. 1486, respectively. Although both are lengthy and comprehensive, both have serious if not fatal flaws, and neither

bill in its current form presents an acceptable basis for reforming the Postal Service.

Despite NPMHU opposition to the bills that have been released by the two Committees, the NPMHU has no choice but to continue to support meaningful and productive postal reform, with the expectation that a majority of members in each chamber of Congress will come to their senses and adopt an appropriate bill.

Fortunately, both Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-OR) have introduced identical and comprehensive postal reform bills that the NPMHU is supporting. If the full Senate or House would simply use those bills as a framework for amending the bills that actually were passed by each Committee, the full Congress still might be able to enact meaningful postal reform before the end of the 113th Congress.

3. Third, the Committee reviewed some limited automation changes that the Postal Service is implementing, paying particular attention to the Flat Sequencing System and a jurisdictional determination that has been pending at the Postal Service for several months—namely, staffing on various Tray Sorters and Universal Sorters.

4. Finally, the Committee also discussed other issues that are crucial to the survival of the Union, including

- The Postal Service's temporary suspension of plans to close and consolidate additional mail processing facilities.
- Recent trends in NPMHU membership numbers.
- Recent subcontracting initiatives by the Postal Service.
- Expected improvements in finances of the Local Unions from recent increases in union membership, the constitutional changes made at the 2012 National Convention, and the re-establishment of wage increases under the National Agreement beginning in November 2013.

The next meeting of the Committee on the Future is scheduled for later in 2014, at which time the Committee will issue another written report.