

COMMITTEE ON THE FUTURE

OF THE NATIONAL POSTAL MAIL HANDLERS UNION

THIS ARTICLE FEATURING THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE FUTURE WAS PRESENTED IN REPORT FORMAT TO ATTENDEES AT THE RECENT SAMLU MEETING HELD IN NEW ORLEANS, LA.

It has now been twenty years since the NPMHU's Committee on the Future was originally created in 1996. During that time, the Committee has engaged in strategic planning over long-term issues that are likely to confront the Union over the coming months and years. The membership of the Committee is comprised of all members of the National Executive Board and various Local Union Presidents. The Committee 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 most recent semi-annual meeting of the Committee, which took place during January 2016, continued this process. The current members of the Committee include all members of the NEB and Local Union Presidents Ernie Grijalva of Local 302, June Harris of Local 306, Pervous ("Andy B") Badilishamwalimu of Local 310, Nick Mosezar of Local 318, Jeff Larsen of Local 323, J.R. Macon of Local 329, and Woody Hendrickson of Local 332. Brothers Badilishamwalimu and Larsen were recently appointed to the Committee, and therefore were attending their first meeting.

Notwithstanding the agenda that frames the Committee's deliberations, the Committee's focus often is determined by current events. It therefore is not surprising that this meeting primarily dealt with the following issues:

First, the Committee held in-depth discussions concerning NPMHU involvement in pending postal reform legislation. National President Hogrogian reported on ongoing meetings with the Postmaster General, her key staff members, the Presidents of all four Postal Unions, and representatives of various mailing groups, all of which have been aimed at reaching a consensus on legislation to be introduced and supported jointly by these three stakeholders. More details about the outcome of these meetings and recent



legislative developments will be shared during the Semi-Annual Meeting of the Local Unions.

The Committee also discussed and analyzed the Postal Service's May 2015 decision to suspend most plant closures and consolidations for one year, exploring various ways to stop or further delay the shuttering of additional mail processing facilities. To this end, the NPMHU is processing a National-level grievance claiming a violation of Handbook PO-408. The Union prevailed in December 2015 on the threshold issue whether it can enforce the terms of that handbook in the grievance and arbitration procedure, and now is arbitrating the merits of that claim, with the first day of hearings taking place on January 27, 2016, just days after the Committee's meetings. The Committee also discussed efforts to accelerate legislative action by the 114th Congress, because a further suspension of additional closings or consolidations should be part of any legislative solution.

The Committee also discussed various automation programs that the Postal Service is beginning to develop, purchase, and deploy. Most notably, the Committee discussed the determination of craft jurisdiction for all duties associated with the operation of the Small Parcel Sorting System (SPSS). As everyone knows, the Postal Service first assigned all of this work to the Mail Handler craft, and then reversed that decision in an improper unilateral or bilateral manner. Lengthy discussions about the ongoing legal proceedings were held by the Committee, and

will again be addressed during the Semi-Annual Meeting of the Local Unions.

The Committee also discussed USPS implementation of the High Speed Flats Feeder, which consists of software updates that should not have any impact on jurisdictional issues.

The Committee also reviewed the latest membership data and continuing approaches to organizing nonmembers, with special emphasis placed on MHAs at two key points in their employment – first, when they are hired as non-career, but bargaining unit employees; and second, when MHAs are converted to full-time regular (FTR) status. It is noteworthy that, through January 2016, USPS records indicate that more than 4,100 MHAs have been converted to career status, since those conversions started in November 2013. The Committee also discussed special issues raised when new career mail handlers have joined the mail handler craft from other employment with the Postal Service.

The Committee's discussions on MHA led directly to a full presentation on this subject, which will be given by Mike Hora at the Semi-Annual Meeting. The Committee hopes that this presentation will help lead the way to greater numbers of MHAs and former MHAs joining the NPMHU.

Finally, representatives from Aetna presented an in-depth report to the Committee about the Mail Handlers Benefit Plan, for which Aetna serves as the underwriter and administrator. The recently completed open season was a success, the details of which will be shared with Local Union representatives at the semi-annual meeting.