

PREPARATIONS FOR NATIONAL BARGAINING UNDERWAY

Paul V. Hogrogian, National President



The President's Task Force on the U.S. Postal Service has finally issued its report and delivered it to the White House on December 4, 2018, almost four months after the August 10, 2018 deadline mandated by the Executive Order that created it. The results were disappointing to say the least, but not totally unexpected.

The Task Force had the opportunity to recommend changes that would truly provide the Postal Service with a sustainable path forward. Notably, the Task Force did address the Postal Service's obligation to fund retiree health benefits when writing that "[t]he Task Force believes that the obligation, including the \$43 billion in pre-funding payments that the USPS failed to pay into the PSRHBFB and the unfunded actuarial liability, must be restructured with the payments re-amortized with a new actuarial calculation based on the population of employees at or near retirement age."

Unfortunately, the Task Force also issued some very detrimental recommendations which, if implemented, would cut services to the American public, raise postal rates to major mailers, and reduce the wages, benefits and collective bargaining rights of all postal employees. The Task Force's recommendations include the following:

- Redefining and reducing the Postal Service's Universal Service Obligation
- Reducing the number and density of Post Offices
- Reducing delivery frequencies
- Reducing door to door delivery
- Retaining the mailbox monopoly but allowing regulated access to private sector competitors
- Lowering Service Standards
- Raising rates for major e-commerce mailers
- Increasing subcontracting of mail processing operations
- Eliminating collective bargaining over the wages of postal employees
- Reducing the wages of postal employees
- Reducing pension or workers compensation benefits of postal employees

Some of these proposals could be implemented through administrative action, while others would require legislation.

The NPMHU believes that many of the Task Force's recommendations would adversely affect the Postal Service, postal customers, postal employees, and the American public. Service would deteriorate, causing further decline in mail volume and creating a death spiral.

While the report itself did not advocate for the full privatization of the Postal Service, it did recommend the expansion of subcontracting mail processing operations. This would set the stage for privatizing the Postal Service.

The NPMHU will continue to work with all stakeholders, including the other postal unions, USPS management, major mailers, Congress, and the White House, to find solutions that will truly put the USPS on a sustainable path forward.

The Task Force has the potential to have a major effect on all postal workers and is a major concern to the NPMHU. We will continue to keep all members informed as more developments unfold.

The NPMHU is about to begin negotiations with the Postal Service over the terms of our collective bargaining agreement. The opening of negotiations is scheduled for June 27th at USPS Headquarters. Our National Agreement is set to expire on September 20, 2019. Preparations for these negotiations began in earnest when a bargaining strategy session was held during the August SAMLU in Washington, DC. Mail Handler representatives from throughout the country discussed the priorities for these negotiations. Solicitations for contract proposals were sent to the field on several occasions in the later part of 2018 and the early part of 2019. I want to thank each and every Mail Handler who submitted a proposal for participating in our process to achieve a fair contract. Proposals generated by mail handlers from around the country are an important aspect in preparing for bargaining. The Field Negotiating Committee met in Washington, DC during the week of February 4th (see related articles in this magazine) to review, discuss, and evaluate every contract proposal that was submitted and to formulate contract proposals of its own.

Our priorities in bargaining include fair and just general wage increases, continuation of our current Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs), keeping the No Lay-Off clause,



improving the rights and benefits for our MHAs, returning subcontracted work to the Mail Handler Craft, putting a stop to future subcontracting, minimizing the dislocation and inconvenience to Mail Handlers subject to involuntary reassignments, and fighting any USPS demand for concessions including proposals to implement new lower wage scales for future career employees that would limit wages or reduce benefits further.

This is not a particularly opportune time during which to bargain. The Postal Service's financial situation, the political stalemate in Congress, the President's Task Force on the Postal Service, the OMB privatization recommendations, and the continuing uncertainty about Postal Reform legislation lead us to believe that these negotiations will be extremely difficult. The APWU's contract with the Postal Service expired on September 20, 2018. However, despite four extensions of negotiations, the parties were unable to reach final agreement and have declared an impasse.

The NPMHU bargaining team is up to the task at hand and will work tirelessly to achieve a fair contract for all Mail Handlers. The NPMHU will keep the membership informed of the progress of these negotiations.

The NPMHU continues to meet with the coalition consisting of postal unions, the Postmaster General and her senior staff, and representatives of the mailing industry to advocate for postal reform that is good for postal employees, good for the Postal Service, and good for the American people. The NPMHU will continue to work with the members of our coalition and with Members of Congress from both sides of the aisle to achieve meaningful postal reform.

The NPMHU, APWU, and USPS continue to implement the terms of the recently negotiated agreement that updates

the RI-399 Dispute Resolution Procedures that were originally signed in 1992. This agreement establishes the process for deciding jurisdictional disputes between NPMHU Mail Handlers and APWU clerks. The parties are in the process of formulating jurisdictional inventories for every postal installation across the country that employs Mail Handlers.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate former National Secretary-Treasurer Tim Dwyer on his retirement and thank him for his long and illustrious career and for all that he did for our great organization during that career.

At the same time, I want to congratulate Mike Hora on his unanimous appointment to the position of National Secretary-Treasurer. Mike brings a wealth of experience, knowledge, and energy to the position. We are extremely fortunate to have someone of Mike's qualifications available to us to serve in his new capacity.

I remain confident that through the work of our Contract Administration Department and our legal representatives, and through the hard work of our Regional, Local, and Branch representatives, we can successfully meet any and all challenges that lie before us. But we must remain united in the face of the Postal Service's attacks on our jobs.

In these and other endeavors, the continuing support of all Mail Handlers is very much appreciated.

Fraternally,

Paul V. Hogrogian
National President