

#YATCR Podcast Ep. 15 Transcript

BRIAN RENFROE, NALC EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

You are listening to NALC's You Are The Current Resident podcast. I'm Brian Renfro, NALC Executive Vice President, and this is your podcast for Monday, August 31st. Today's podcast is dedicated to an audio version of the August 31st statement from President Fred Rolando to NALC members, as you'll hear in just a moment. This statement covers a variety of topics such as collective bargaining, legislation and, of course, the latest on where we are with different issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

So here is NALC President Fred Rolando with his August 31st statement to NALC members.

FREDRIC ROLANDO, NALC PRESIDENT

Letter carriers are angry, frustrated, and embarrassed by the widespread reports of mail service delays. We take great pride in serving our customers. But a combination of ill-conceived USPS initiatives and misguided communications, combined with COVID related staffing shortages, have resulted in delayed mail and non-delivery of routes throughout the country. The Postal Service has also initiated other operational changes that have made the letter carrier job more difficult and less efficient. To make matters worse, all of this has happened while letter carriers are dealing with the fear and anxiety of serving on the front lines through a deadly pandemic.

We receive daily reports from the field regarding delayed mail and undelivered routes. We provide this data to USPS headquarters, holding them accountable for identifying and correcting the source of the directives. If and when you have instances of delayed mail and/or undelivered routes, please inform a NALC branch representative or your NALC national business agent. We will continue this communication until these service issues are resolved.

In early August, NALC initiated a national-level grievance regarding the Postal Service's unilateral implementation of the delivery initiative test called Expedited Street/Afternoon Sortation (ESAS). The ESAS initiative substantially alters the Expedited Preferential Mail process and other delivery practices and procedures outlined in the Handbooks M-39 and M-41. These changes directly impact terms and conditions of employment of city letter carriers in violation of Article 19 of the National Agreement. Implementation of this headquarters initiative, as well as many locally induced variations of this initiative, have been responsible for many of the instances of delayed preferential mail and non-delivery of routes, or portions of routes. As a result of our discussions, the Postal Service terminated the ESAS initiative effective 8-19-20, and we are exchanging drafts for the grievance settlement.

Another initiative is the Postal Service's unilateral implementation of what it calls Post Office Sortation Equipment Reconciliation (SER). On July 31, 2020, USPS notified NALC of the SER initiative and characterized it as a "review" which would solicit "feedback" from employees. However, subsequent documentation shows that the Postal Service has instructed local management to reduce casing equipment and cell sizes causing widespread violations of the handbooks and manuals while making casing more difficult and less efficient. A national level grievance has been filed on the SER initiative as well. In the last few days, the SER initiative has been halted pending our discussions with the Postal Service on the program.

We have also had reports in some parts of the country of management dictating that park and loop routes must be reconfigured so that there are no more than four park points on such routes. These appear to be misguided local directives, so if this is happening in your office, please immediately notify your branch representative or your national business agent so we can get it corrected.

The Postal Service is currently in the process of transitioning to a new organizational structure consisting of three separate operating sectors: Retail & Delivery, Logistics and Processing, and Commerce. The current field structure for processing and delivering the mail consists of 67 Districts within 7 Areas that report to a Headquarters COO. Under the new structure, the delivery and retail sector will consist of 67 Districts (for now) within 4 Areas reporting to one Headquarters COO, and the processing and logistics sector will consist of 12 Divisions within 2 Regions reporting to another Headquarters COO.

Regardless of the operational structure of the Postal Service, NALC will continue to prioritize safe and efficient work methods, good service to our customers, dignity and respect in the workplace, and contractual compliance. Regarding delivery operations, we hope we've seen the last of unilateral implementation of reckless initiatives, and we look forward to working with the new operations team in our joint task forces to accomplish our common goals.

Pursuant to Article 34 notification to NALC, an outside company hired by the Postal Service recently began conducting a study of city carriers' office activities in about 36 sites. Their stated objective is to observe letter carrier office duties and to collect data to potentially develop new work methods or standards.

NALC will continue to send a local or regional representative into each site prior to the study beginning to explain the study to the letter carriers and answer any questions they may have. Once the data collection is complete, those representatives will return and obtain feedback from the carriers involved in the study. NALC headquarters will continue to monitor this test closely and exercise its rights as necessary in accordance with Article 34 of the National Agreement. Letter carriers are reminded to continue performing their duties as they normally do, and in accordance with Handbook M-41 provisions.

This was one of several initiatives implemented by the former postal operations team who chose to proceed unilaterally rather than working with the NALC through the joint City Delivery Task Force incorporated in the National Agreement. We are discussing with the Postal Service whether this unilateral study will be continued, and if so, how the data will be used.

On June 3rd, we settled a national-level grievance regarding the Postal Service's unilateral testing of Consolidated Casing. This settlement, M-01923 in NALC's Materials Reference System, required that half of the 62 test sites be returned to their original route structure by July 31, 2020. The remaining 31 test sites will continue through November 27, 2020.

While the consolidated casing has been terminated in the first 31 sites, about half of these sites were not returned to their original route structures and schedules, resulting in non-compliance grievances. Some of the non-complaint sites have been corrected, and we will continue to work with the new operations team to correct the rest.

The pandemic has made it difficult for letter carriers and others to make plans for use of their annual leave during the leave year 2020. Several weeks ago, I approached the Postal Service about entering into an agreement to increase the maximum number of annual leave hours (currently 440) that could be carried over from the 2020 leave year to the 2021 leave year. I am optimistic we will have such an agreement soon.

We are well prepared to begin the Interest Arbitration hearings for a new National Agreement. At the same time, we have continued negotiations with the Postal Service in an attempt to reach a tentative settlement that we could send out to the membership for a ratification vote. We will either reach a tentative agreement in the next couple weeks, or we will begin the hearings which are scheduled to commence on September 23rd.

I reported in my July 15th statement that the Postal Service had completed their testing of temperature measuring equipment and had identified a company that will provide technicians to conduct what they describe as highly accurate COVID-19 testing in postal facilities. Since then, we have exchanged drafts regarding procedures and protocols for further proof of concept tests in a couple of USPS locations that would include both mandatory temperature measurements and voluntary on-site testing. We appear to be in agreement regarding the procedures, and I anticipate testing the concept will begin shortly and last about 30 days. Once we work out any issues from the test locations, we will discuss if, where and when to implement the agreed upon protocols to help curb the spread of the virus.

On August 13th, the NALC Executive Council voted unanimously to endorse the Biden/Harris ticket for president and vice-president in the upcoming election. The political diversity of our membership is one of the many strengths of our union, and we respect the political opinions of our members that range from the far left to the far right, and everywhere in between. While we all share the desire to protect our wages, benefits, working conditions, and to ensure the success of the Postal Service, not every

member makes their voting decisions based on how it will affect their job or career. How members vote and what issues matter most to them is their business and their decision. However, for our members that do base their voting decisions on how it affects their jobs and careers, NALC will always provide information on where candidates stand on those issues, poll our members on their preferences, and ultimately make an endorsement of the candidate that best serves the job-related issues facing our members. This time around, the member polling data, candidate questionnaire responses, party platforms, and candidate positions on postal issues made the endorsement choice easy.

On August 18th, I announced that the NALC will begin working with the Postal Service in a joint labor management task force to meet the challenges posed by the COVID-19 virus with regard to handling of election mail. Formation of the task force comes as a result of my initial meeting with PMG DeJoy, where I suggested that we create a joint labor management task force to meet these specific challenges and work together in response to the public health crisis that is expected to dramatically expand the role of mail voting during the upcoming national election. Meetings of the joint task force on election mail will begin next week. We will work to establish messaging and protocols ahead of the election to ensure the expedited handling of all political and election mail, particularly for mailed out ballots, and to assure the public and our election board partners that they can rely on the Postal Service to deliver exceptional service.

NALC has created a new fact sheet called The 2020 General Election: America Can Count on the U.S. Postal Service. In the fact sheet, we explain such things as the USPS history and role in voting by mail, our capacity to deliver the anticipated high volume of ballots, our well established protocols in place regarding election mail, as well as why the public can feel confident that their ballots will be handled in a safe and secure manner. The fact sheet can be found on the 'legislative activities' page of the 'Government Affairs' section of the NALC website.

Since my last statement, there has been no meaningful progress in negotiations between House and Senate leadership and the White House regarding financial relief for the Postal Service in a new stimulus package. Last week, the House of Representatives passed the Delivering for America Act, a stand-alone Postal bill that would provide \$25 billion in direct financial relief to the Postal Service and ensure that no changes in service can be made that would result in delays during the pandemic. The previously passed HEROES Act from the House, and the Senate's Postal Service Emergency Assistance Act were both explained in my statement from July 15, 2020.

Whether the negotiations materialize into a stand-alone Postal bill, or a broad stimulus bill, NALC will continue to lobby aggressively for direct financial relief, favorable loan terms, and hazard pay. Again, for more information on how to take action, please visit the 'Government Affairs' page on the NALC website, and continue to encourage your family, friends, and neighbors to do the same by visiting www.HeroesDelivering.com.

To support our lobbying efforts, NALC commissioned a poll in May on the importance and funding of the Postal Service during the pandemic. The results of that poll clearly showed that a broad sample of Americans overwhelmingly support both the Postal Service and its direct funding through an appropriation. In July, we once again commissioned North Star Opinion Research and Hart Research Associates to survey 1200 registered voters aged 60 or above across the nation, 25% being veterans. Eighty-nine percent of those surveyed support federal financial assistance for the Postal Service in the next stimulus, the figure is 90 percent among veterans.

Both groups, furthermore, say that their votes in the fall election will be strongly influenced by whether their elected representatives help provide the Postal Service with the same support provided to other sectors of the economy. Sixty-four percent of those surveyed said they would be less likely to vote for lawmakers who oppose federal support for USPS, a figure that rises to 70 percent among veterans.

Not surprisingly, this poll overwhelmingly demonstrates that the Postal Service is important to their lives and well-being as indicated by 96 percent of the voters polled, 99 percent of the veterans, 97 percent of those in rural communities, and 94 percent of those registered as Republicans.

The Postal Service finds itself at the center of the media universe, and at the crossroads of politics, election planning, and legislative maneuvering. The current state and future of the Postal Service have the attention of the entire nation, as public support for protecting the level of service they rely on and securing its financial health continues to grow. The bottom line is that the country highly values our services in normal times, yet with the upcoming election and the new world pandemic, the American people need their Postal Service more than ever. The recent lapses in service have placed legitimate fears in the minds of the public regarding the Postal Service's ability to deliver what they need, when they need it.

So amidst the media storm, NALC will continue to directly focus on what we are doing internally and externally to keep our letter carriers as safe as possible through the pandemic, to restore service disrupted by misguided directives and initiatives that have caused delays and non-delivery, to prioritize our commitment to successfully handle the increased volume of mail ballots and restore the public's confidence in our ability to do so, and to secure the pandemic-related appropriations from Congress. At this point in time, using the media to effect change would be a last resort.

Just as the number of people throughout the country affected by the pandemic continue to rise, so do the number of postal employees being affected. Today, almost 5700 postal employees are under quarantine from the virus. Almost 44,000 previously quarantined postal employees have been cleared and returned to work. About 1800 of the currently quarantined postal employees have tested positive for the virus, and another 400 plus are presumed to be positive. Another 7600 postal employees who tested positive in the past have recovered and returned to work. Of all these numbers, about thirty percent are letter carriers. Sadly, 83 active postal employees have passed

away from the virus, including 18 city letter carriers. We have been notified of 4 retired members who have passed away from the virus as well.

Thank you for all that you do. As you continue your heroic work serving the American public each day, please take every precaution regarding social distancing and face coverings. God bless each of you and your families, please stay safe.

BRIAN RENFROE, NALC EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

That was NALC President Fred Rolando with his August 31st statement to NALC members. As always, we encourage you to follow us on social media. We're on every major social media platform. The easiest way to get there is by going to NALC and up in the top right side of the page, you'll see links to each of those those different outlets. And as always, we want to express our appreciation to all the letter carriers across the country for your hard work and dedication through a year unlike any other.

Until next time, be safe.
