



MEMO To The Branch 2184 Leadership Council, April 12, 2022

Walt McGregory
Jackie McGregory
Darryl Clay
Mel MacDonald
Cathy Tondreau
Jim Powell
Phil Ashford
Tracy Mitchell
Gloria Warthen
Felicia Davis
Leonard Zawisa
Joe Golonka
Dave Reise
Erik Venzke
Kris Shaw
Mark Owen
Bryon Hendricks
Jillian Hudgins
Symone Coleman
Yvonne Jackson
Karl Tamburro
Shaun Fowlkes
Chanel Harrison
Lillian Bogosian
Scherrie Lacey
Scherkeira Wells
Scott Watts
Valerie Watkins
Elizabeth Bays
Tamara Bosman
Kristie Nelson
Diego Forshaw
Otis Barney
Keith Benedict
William Douglas
Jake Szor
Jeffrey Webb
Nakia Whitfield
Katrina Jones
Ananias Epps
Ramon Robinson
Tonya Rutledge
Paul Bordine
Mike Tredway
Danita Hill

This will begin as usual with an update of Branch events and administrative matters. The Branch will in the near term continue to conduct our meetings virtually by utilizing the WebEx program, as well as telephonically. This will include the regular monthly membership meeting on Wednesday May 4, as well as steward meetings on Tuesday May 10 and Monday May 16, and the executive board meeting on May 23. Note that the executive board meeting will take place a week earlier than usual because of the Memorial Day holiday.

Plans are proceeding for the return of the NALC Food Drive this year on Saturday, May 14. Branch 2184 will be fully participating, as in the past. Station coordinators and stewards will be receiving updated information about the Food Drive during the next few weeks.

On Tuesday, March 8, the United States Senate passed the Postal Service Reform Act of (H.R. 3076) by a vote of 79-19. The legislation had been 12 years in the making and had previously been passed in the House of Representatives on February 8. It has been sent to President Biden for his signature to become law. Key provisions of this bipartisan legislation repeal the mandate to pre-fund retiree health care benefits decades in advance, and codify a minimum of six-day delivery of mail and packages into federal law. This will eliminate the need to renew the six-day requirement every year through the congressional appropriations process.

The bill also maximizes the integration of future postal annuitants into Medicare without in any manner limiting annuitant coverage and benefits under the Federal Employee Health Benefits (FEHB) Program. The legislation was led in the Senate by Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee (HSGAC) Chairman, Michigan Senator Gary Peters and reflects a broad bipartisan consensus that is supported by the four postal unions, the mailing industry and Postal Service management. The focused activism of NALC members across the United States was critical to the passage of this historic legislation, which addresses most of the longstanding external challenges to the Postal Service. It now remains to be seen if the USPS can get its act together to effectively address many of its self-created internal challenges.

On March 15-18, Branch 2184 hosted a School of Stewards I training conducted by the National Business Agents Office for NALC Region 6. Three Branch 2184 stewards, William Douglas, Tonya Rutledge, and Ananias Epps attended and successfully completed the training, with Tonya and an attendee from another Branch tying for the highest test score. Branch 2184 stewards have always demonstrated exceptional contract enforcement knowledge, and this long-established tradition continues.

On Sunday, March 20, nearly 100 NALC members from the Region 6 – the K.I.M. Region or Kentucky, Indiana, and Michigan, participated in the highly informative virtual retirement seminar that was conducted our National Business Agents office. This included at least 20 members from Branch 2184.

Branch 2184 steward Keith Benedict will be attending the School of Stewards II training on May 3 through 6 in Indianapolis, Indiana. Additionally, Branch 2184 Contract Administration Unit member and injury compensation specialist Erik Venzke, Branch Vice-Presidents Jackie McGregory and Darryl Clay, as well as Branch Trustee and injury compensation specialist Tracy Mitchell will be attending OWCP training on conducted by the NALC Region 6 National Business Agents office on May 10 and 11 at the NALC Branch 1 office in Detroit.

A key component of union representation is providing timely and accurate information to our membership, with an emphasis on **accurate**. Stewards and Branch officers are frequently asked questions about contractual and work rule information as well as about applicable laws and larger scale Postal Service matters. These questions occur on the post office work floor, in calls made to the union office, as well as in other situations and forums. **It is essential that the information provided in response to member questions is always correct.**

With this in mind, NEVER guess or provide information that you are unsure about in response to a member inquiry. Even if you “think” that you know the answer – always make sure! As a rule of thumb, unless you can cite a specific source for information you are providing, do NOT do so unless and until you have verified it. Your integrity as well as that of the Branch and the NALC is at stake. When in doubt, advise the member that you will get back to them – and then be sure to follow up. Nobody knows everything in this business and there is always much more to learn.

Branch 2184 continues to hold the distinction of being the largest NALC Branch with 100% participation of its leadership in the Letter Carrier Political Fund (LCPF). The NALC’s legislative clout was amply displayed with the bipartisan passage of the recent Postal Reform legislation. Yet, there is still much more to be accomplished in the legislative arena. It is quite apparent that far too many letter carriers, and not just newer carriers, have little or no understanding of the critical importance of the legislative process to the Postal Service, to the NALC, and all of Organized Labor.

A pertinent example of the above is a widely held but erroneous belief by many letter carriers that retirement-related matters are part of the Contract negotiations process, which is not and has never been the case. For example, there is a lot of interest with allowing non-career employees such as CCAs to “buy back” retirement credit for time spent in a non-career status, in much the same manner that former military service members can already do. Many carriers have called for the NALC to “negotiate” this into the next Contract – without knowing or understanding that ALL retirement matters are governed by Federal Laws and are NOT subjects for Contract negotiations. There is legislation (H.R. 4268) that was introduced in the current Congress that would amend the FERS retirement law to allow the opportunity to buy back retirement credit for non-career service by making retirement contributions for these time periods. However, at this time the legislation has not been further advanced in Congress, meaning that it is not on the current agenda for debate and a possible vote to adopt it. That is where the LCPF and carrier activism comes in.

With rampant and repeated Contract violations including but not limited to those involving the assignment of overtime work in many Branch 2184-represented stations as well as elsewhere, the NALC has begun to gain some success with escalating (increasing) grievance remedies where the Union has carefully documented a repeated and continuing pattern of willful violations committed by Postal management. However, grievances requesting escalating remedies must be selectively chosen and must ALWAYS involve NEW violations of a contractual provision or provisions that has previously been successfully grieved at specific location. Never attempt to re-litigate a previous violation that has already been the subject of a grievance settlement, no matter how egregious any continuing violations are. The legal doctrine of “res judicata” – meaning something previously adjudicated, will be applied and the grievance will be unsuccessful.

The Department of Labor (DOL) has announced that their Office of Workers Compensation Programs (OWCP) will no longer be accepting paper forms for OWCP claims submission. With this in mind, stewards and Branch officers should be prepared to assist any member by providing information for the member to register for an ECOMP account. Attached to this memo is the DOL's own instructions for this purpose. Please keep this with your union documents and be sure to reference it or make copies whenever necessary. Also keep in mind that that our members must be allowed access to employing agency computers for purposes of initiating an OWCP claim (CA-1 or CA-2). Make sure that such access is not being delayed or denied.

The NALC and the Postal Service have agreed to a Memorandum of Understanding (M-01979) that increases the maximum allowable annual leave carryover amounts outlined in the Employee and Labor Relations Manual (ELM). For leave year 2023, regular work force career employees covered by the USPS-NALC National Agreement may carry over 520 hours of accumulated annual leave from leave year 2022 to leave year 2023. Provisions in the Employee and Labor Relations Manual (ELM) regarding payment of accumulated leave are not changed as a result of this MOU, which expires December 31, 2023.