

National Business Agent's Report
Mike Weir
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This article is being written on the heels of the successful passage of H.R. 22 by an overwhelming majority in the House of Representatives. The one-year amended version of this Bill reduces the amount the Postal Service must pay to pre-fund retirees' healthcare benefits from 5.4 billion to 1.4 billion dollars. This will provide much needed short-term financial relief for the USPS, and will give us more time to work with Congress to develop a long-term solution to the onerous pre-funding provisions of the 2006 Postal Reform legislation. Hopefully, by the time you read this article, the Senate will have followed suit and President Obama will have signed the Bill into law, enabling NALC to direct our attention toward exploring new ways to expand our delivery network in contrast to USPS' short-sighted proposals to contract it and reduce service.

By this time, I am sure that everyone is aware of the retirement incentive program that the Postal Service offered to clerks and mail handlers. It appears that a much larger number of eligible employees will be taking advantage of this opportunity than with the previous VERA offerings. The fact that USPS sweetened the pot and opened the program to those already eligible for optional retirement certainly contributed to the increased level of participation. Additionally, the concern about being excessed into another craft in a different installation probably played a role as well. Many members have inquired as to whether a similar offer will be made to letter carriers. While I do not have a crystal ball, I suspect that such an incentive program will not be forthcoming in the near future. Unfortunately, due to the drop in mail volume, fewer clerk positions are needed; and normal attrition alone is not sufficient to balance the workforce with the workload. This is resulting in employees being placed on stand-by time for several hours per day. On the other hand, even with the loss of assignments due to MIARAP adjustments, we still do not have enough letter carriers to handle the workload that currently exists. At this point, the Postal Service is concentrating its efforts on the crafts where they can get the most bang for the buck. Hopefully, mail volume will begin to rebound; and we

will be able to, once again, hire more employees rather than seek ways to further reduce our complements.

Recently, I had an opportunity to watch an FSS machine in action. One of two machines planned for the Kansas City, MO Plant is up and running, and providing sequenced flats to the Shawnee Mission, KS installation. I must confess I was impressed by the size and complexity of the machine. However, I was much more impressed by the attitude and approach of the letter carriers in the main office I visited the following day to assess the quality of the product and the methodology for handling a daily third bundle. Each carrier was very forthcoming about the flats being properly sequenced, for the most part. They also pointed out problems, such as the bar codes being applied over the addresses and the flats being reversed, which were occurring periodically and which they hoped could be corrected. The carriers also recognized the seriousness of USPS' financial condition and the importance of proceeding with automated flats; and they were willing to do what they could to make it work. Nonetheless, they were frustrated by not having significant input and guidance on how best to handle the mail on the street in an FSS environment; and they were concerned that management was, again, sacrificing service in their zeal to make their numbers look good. Additionally, as usual, management was putting undue pressure on the carriers to make the numbers that they had predetermined from their drawing-board projections. The fact is FSS was never going to have the impact they envisioned; and with the drop in mail volume, the impact will now be even more diffused and less significant. Still, despite the fact that they had no time to become familiar with the MIARAP adjustments, much less delivering FSS mail, and that management seems intent on pushing forward as quickly as possible with additional adjustments based on anticipated FSS savings, these letter carriers continued to do their jobs as professionally, safely and effectively as possible. My fear is that management will make unrealistic adjustments, resulting in daily confrontations over workload and a poisoned atmosphere on the workroom floor. Fortunately, the MOU requires a sixty day review and the potential for full scale inspections under such a scenario.

Of even greater concern is the letters which were sent to 64 letter carriers in this installation, notifying them of the potential for them to be excessed to another installation within 60 days. While I believe this number is completely unrealistic, the bottom-line is that many carriers will suffer undue emotional stress as a result of receiving these notices; and, certainly, many carriers will actually be displaced. We will continue to monitor the situation to ensure that management adheres to the provisions of the National Agreement and our MOUs, and that letter carriers' rights are protected and adverse impact is minimized.

If you have a son or daughter who will be attending college in the Fall of 2010 or know of a member who does, please make them aware of and encourage them to apply for the Charles J. Coyle Scholarship Program. Applications are available at the branch level or from the regional office. The student must submit their application by December 31, 2009 to be eligible. After that deadline, we will send each applicant detailed instructions regarding the information they must provide us to be included in the drawings at the appropriate state conventions next year. If you have any questions or need any additional information, contact us at the regional office.

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