

## First line of Defense!

Under the APWU Constitution the first line of defense against a subpar contract is the Rank & File Committee. They are appointed each by a member of the NEB and one additional member comes from the Deaf & Hard of Hearing task Force for a total of 13 brave souls. It is an exclusive club of union officers and leaders who normally hear and see everything associated with negotiations, or at least they should. They are sworn to secrecy and meet as needed or as called by the national president.

Since 2003 the R&F Committee has been called upon to evaluate contracts/contract extensions on 4 occasions. The 2015-2018 was an arbitrated contract. The last two negotiated contracts in 2006 and 2010 received unanimous support of the R&F Committee (R&FC). And despite the politics of the day, both agreements served this union well and laid the foundation for today's successes and recent major arbitration wins.

In 2005 the R&FC was evaluating a one year extension and it was approved by the R&FC but it was not unanimous. At the next NPC after the R&FC approved to send the extension to the members for ratification, you would have thought it failed the R&FC. The extension wasn't being well received and members of the R&FC were jockeying for their position of supporting or not supporting the extension. It was little funny, but also sad that we had no idea how members of the R&FC had voted or the actual vote count.

Forward to 2006, I was selected by Greg Bell to serve on the R&FC. And while it doesn't matter to anyone else, I need to recognize Jim Burke who was the coordinator at the time and someone I had just ran an election against a few years earlier. The politics of the day required Greg to at least discuss my appointment with Jim and based on the fact that I was appointed, Jim was a standup guy.

In 2006 President Burrus was in charge! You never knew what to expect, but let me say that Burrus was clearly in charge but so very inclusive. He didn't wait until the last minute to provide us briefings on the issues, he brought us to DC for what seemed like 20 plus days from August – December 2006 to participate and provide our two cents. Burrus while we knew he was in charge also knew that he had to receive R&FC support and he wasn't looking for a majority, it would be unanimous.

On the first day the R&FC met we elected a chair and co-chair and proceeded to discuss the process we would follow. With the 2005 extension and the unknown of how the R&FC had voted, I objected to signing anything that didn't indicate my individual vote. It was a little contentious at times, but in the end we agreed that the vote would be recorded and we would all sign. So that if the contract was approved 7-6 it would be reported that way. And then I guess we could all run around claiming which side we were on depending on how people felt about the contract.

I know we were in DC as the expiration time approached because Burrus approved my leaving to travel to NC to see my granddaughter being born. I was to return on Saturday by noon to get an update on where we were. Much of the contractual language was resolved, however MVS had reported that they

were getting nowhere and intervention was necessary. I took that to mean that Burrus would nudge someone and he did and MVS was back on track. We received a report from the clerk craft about a new task force on Bilingual Sales & Service Associate. With few exceptions the committee was not interested. It was explained that there were parts of the country where the primary language spoken in those neighborhoods was not English and they needed specific languages. We said, no problem provide language training to bidders. But it was clear we had no interest in such a task force.

Fast forward, Burrus believes he has a wage package which includes the changes to the postal services payment of the higher amount for APWU health benefits. We receive the briefings in detail, we ask numerous questions and we discussed in full the entire contract. If we had questions we brought back the craft director or officer who negotiated the provision. It was then that I discovered that the clerk craft left the Bilingual Memo in the contract.

We met to vote on the contract and I decided that with the Bilingual Task Force that I couldn't support the contract. I was summoned to the principal's office (Burrus's office) where we discussed my reason for not supporting the contract. My discussion with Burrus remain private, but let me say this, the Task force never happened, and yes I supported the contract.

While serving on the R&FC was a great honor, it came with a huge responsibility to evaluate what the parties negotiated and decide if it's worthy of being sent to the membership. Per our constitution a rejection of a proposed contract comes with a mandate for our leaders to reopen negotiations and attempt to achieve a better contract. I would like to thank everyone who has served and currently serves on the R&FC; it is both an honor and a huge responsibility. If you adhere to the national constitution and perform your assignment to the best of your ability that is all we can ask of you.

We should never fear arbitration. We didn't fear arbitration in 2015 or in 2000. I have always believed a negotiated agreement is always better than an arbitrated agreement. However I am just as proud of those R&FC members who may vote to reject a subpar contract as those who have supported contracts of the past. That is what the process provides for and I for one am glad the process works.