



Mail Handlers Local Union No. 323

1602 Selby Ave., Suite 5 St. Paul, MN 55104
(651) 646-2827 Fax (651) 646-0991 LocalOffice@local323.org

Minutes of the Local Union 323 Council Meeting ST. PAUL, MN May 27, 2021

Jeff Larsen

Local President

Dean Abatte

Vice President

Brian Newhouse

Recording Secretary

John Frey

Treasurer

State Executive

Board Members

Shane Ryden

Minnesota

Brock Engstrom

North Dakota

Branch Presidents

Dean Abatte

Minneapolis

Edward Yun

St. Paul

Mike Straiton

BMC

Brock Engstrom

Fargo

Local President, Jeff Larsen called to order the Local Union 323 Council at 10:30 a.m.

Recording Secretary Brian Newhouse took roll call.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Local President: Jeff Larsen

Vice President: Dean Abatte

Recording Secretary: Brian Newhouse

Treasurer: John Frey

MN State Representative: Shane Ryden

ND State Representative: Brock Engstrom

St. Paul Branch President: Ed Yun

Minneapolis Branch President: Dean Abatte

Fargo Branch President: Brock Engstrom

NDC Branch President: Mike Straiton

Review of the Previous Minutes:

The Council reviewed the minutes from the previous meeting on August 20, 2020. Fargo Branch President/ND-SEBM Engstrom motioned to accept the minutes of the previous meeting and was seconded by Treasurer Frey. The motion carried.

President's Report:

President Larsen provided the Council a copy of the President's report. (See attached copy).

- Local 323 Complement
- COVID-19 EFEL
- Legislative Issues – Postal Reform
- Arbitration Activity
- Career Conversions – Mail Handlers Benefit Plan
- Local Website
- Matt Lopez – Local 323 Scholarship
- Arthur S. Vallone NPMHU National Scholarship

- 2021 LIUNA Convention Delegate Election

Treasurers Report

Review of the Profit and Loss Statement.

Officer Reports

Vice President – EFEL issues; particularly, no documentation required for Item 8.

Minneapolis – ADUS issues, higher level qualification issues, extended leave requests

MN-SEBM – St. Cloud: New steward, and shortage of Mail Handlers.

ND-SEBM – Bismarck to receive more mail from Minot.

St. Paul – ADUS to be staffed by Mail Handlers only; many cross-craft violations, new scheduled start times, 204b issues.

President's Agenda Items

- Contract Administration

Those items reserved for the Local Union Council

- Local Scholarship

Additional Items

- **Picnic** - to be discussed at Executive Board Meeting on June 28, 2021.

VP/Minneapolis Branch President Abatte motioned to adjourn, Treasurer Frey seconded the motion, motion carried, and meeting adjourned at 1:22 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Brian Newhouse
Recording Secretary Local 323
National Postal Mail Handlers Union

cc: **Local Union Council**
Branch Leaders
File



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May 27, 2021

Local President's Report Local Union Council

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Local 323 Complement:

The Local 323 career complement as of Pay Period 10-21 is 671 (589 MN & 82 ND) and the MHA complement is 112 (97 MN & 15 ND). Combined Membership is 705.

- **COVID-19 – Emergency Federal Employee Leave**

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic appears to be subsiding. Most people, at least in Minnesota, have been fully vaccinated, the number of new infections continues to trend downward, and States as well as Local governments have begun easing mask requirements. The Postal Service has eased mask requirements to situations where social distancing of six (6) feet cannot be maintained, or in public-facing settings when required by State or Local orders or directives.

On March 11, 2021, President Biden signed the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021 into law. This ARPA included the Emergency Federal Employee Leave (EFEL) benefit which provides for the payment of up to 600 hours of leave (15 weeks) under specific circumstances when an employee is unable to work because of the COVID-19 virus. EFEL benefits are available to both Mail Handlers and MHAs. These became available on March 11th and will continue, if funding remains available, through September 30, 2021.

The Office of Personal Management (OPM) was tasked with providing guidelines for implementing EFEL to all Federal Agencies and the Postal Service. These guidelines came well after the effective date and were issued on April 30th. This resulted in a situation with all EFEL from March 11th through May 3rd being designated as conditional. On May 7th, the Postal Service sent letters to all employees who had been conditionally approved which outlined the documentation required for their EFEL request(s). These employees had until May 21st to provide their documentation to management.

The Local Office and the Branch Offices have been deeply involved in issues related to EFEL. Our first objective was to ensure that no Mail Handler or MHA was improperly denied leave to which they were entitled; secondly, we strived to ensure that management did not request documentation beyond the scope of OPM guidelines.

Numerous documents were provided to the Branch Offices, both before and after the issuance of OPM guidelines. The Branch Representatives often received this information before it trickled down to the work floor. Each Representative in every Branch worked to provide EFEL information to the Membership. I am confident that we possess a sound understanding of the issues and we will keep an eye on these issues going forward.

- **Legislative Issues – Postal Reform**

The prospect of meaningful Postal reform seems to be gaining speed in Congress.

On May 13th, the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee passed two separate bills which address USPS finances and operations. The first bill is the Postal Service Reform Act of 2021 (H.R. 3076). This bill was passed by a voice vote, with bipartisan support, and without amendment. It may now proceed to a vote on the floor of the House of Representatives. The provisions of H.R. 3076 include codifying six-day delivery, requiring Postal retirees to enroll in Medicare at 65, and eliminating the pre-funding mandate related to retiree health benefits.

The second bill the Committee passed, was the Postal Service Improvement Act of 2021 (H.R. 3077). This bill passed with only Democrat votes. The provisions of H.R. 3077 require that mailed elections ballots have a USPS trackable barcode and other specific indicia; and it provides for extending paid parental leave to Postal employees. It is worth noting, that Republicans opposed all amendments offered by the Democrats. These amendments concerned upgrading the USPS delivery fleet to electric vehicles and more strict service standards. H.R. 3067 is now also preceding to a full House vote. The future may not look too bright for this one.

A Senate version of the Postal Service Reform Act was introduced in the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee on May 19th. According to the Committee's website:

U.S. Senators Rob Portman (R-OH) and Gary Peters (D-MI), Ranking Member and Chairman of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, introduced bipartisan legislation to set the United States Postal Service on more sustainable financial footing and support the goal of providing long-term reliable service across the country. The bill strengthens transparency and accountability for Postal Service performance, eliminates unnecessary financial burdens, and helps ensure the Postal Service can better serve the American people. U.S.

Senators Richard Burr (R-NC), Tom Carper (D-DE), Thom Tillis (R-NC), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Shelley Capito (R-WV), Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ), Steve Daines (R-MT), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), Susan Collins (R-ME), Alex Padilla (D-CA), Dan Sullivan (R-AK), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Josh Hawley (R-MO), Brian Schatz (D-HI), Mike Rounds (R-SD), Roy Blunt (D-MO), Joe Manchin (D-WV), and Tina Smith (D-MN) joined Portman and Peters in introducing the bill as original cosponsors. A bipartisan companion bill was approved by the House Committee on Oversight and Reform last week.

It has been reported that the Senate and House versions of the Postal Service Reform Act are identical. I have reviewed the currently unnumbered Senate Resolution and that does appear to be the case. All things considered, it seems that Postal Reform may actually pass this year.

But wait, there's more ...

- **Arbitration Activity**

Local 323 was scheduled for regular regional arbitration in the NDC Branch on April 27th. MN State Executive Board Member Shane Ryden was assigned this hearing date. This involved one class action and one individual grievance. Both grievances concerned the treatment of Mail Handlers by a supervisor. These grievances were resolved prior to hearing.

Unrelated to this hearing date, I withdrew one NDC grievance which was pending on the arbitration docket. That was an individual grievance which concerned movement outside of the section. The underlying issue had been resolved due to changes made in the NDC LMOU during Local Negotiations; and there was no reason to continue pursuing this grievance.

Arbitration is currently scheduled for the NDC Branch on July 16th. Vice President Dean Abatte has been assigned this hearing date. We will be meeting, along with Branch President Mike Straiton, to discuss the grievances soon.

- **Career Conversions – Mail Handlers Benefit**

Newly converted career Mail Handlers have 60 days from the date of their career appointment to enroll in a Federal Employee Health Benefit (FEHB) insurance plan. If they don't make a selection in this 60 day window, they will be considered to have declined coverage, and must wait to enroll until the next Open Season or Qualifying Life Event.

Please encourage them to consider our plan, the Mail Handlers Benefit Plan (MHBP), when looking into their health insurance choices. The MHBP provides three coverage

options which allow everyone to personalize costs and benefits to their individual needs. Please remind our newly converted Mail Handlers that they must enroll in a FEHB plan within 60 days of the date on which they're converted.

- **Local Web Site**

Minor refinements continue to be made to the updated Local 323 web site. All aspects of the implementation are going according to plan. Additional information continues to be added to the "Training and Reference" section of the Steward's database. There are already many documents covering specific topics contained in this section. There is more information to come, and that process is continuing.

- **Matt Lopez – Local 323 Scholarship**

The 2021 Matt Lopez Local 323 Scholarship was announced earlier this week. The announcement was made on the Local 323 web site and through a posting circulated to the Branches.

The 2021 program provides for a 4-year \$800.00 annual Scholarship which begins in September of this year. Opening date for the acceptance of applications is June 1, 2021, and the closing date is June 30, 2021. Any graduating senior who is the son, daughter, or legal ward of any regular member in good standing of Local 323 of the National Postal Mail Handlers Union may apply.

- **Arthur S. Vallone – NPMHU National Scholarship**

It has been several years since there has been a recipient of the National Scholarship from Local 323. Accordingly, I am very please to announce that Jakob Ryden, son of Minneapolis Branch Member and Minnesota State Executive Board Member Shane Ryden, has been selected to be a recipient. I'm sure the Local Executive Board, the Local Union Council, and the Membership of Local 323, join me in congratulating Jakob and Shane. Put another way, congratulations dudes!

- **2021 LIUNA Convention Delegate Election**

Local 323 is currently in the process of holding an election for a Delegate to the 2021 LIUNA Convention. The Local Executive Board appointed Tony Stickler of the NDC Branch, Nicole Rodriguez of the St. Paul Branch, and Jarred Hoover of the Minneapolis Branch, to serve as Judges of election. The Nomination Meeting was held on May 20th at the Local Office. Both prior to, and after the Nomination Meeting, the Judges convened to make sure the election was being held in compliance with the election rules. That process is ongoing. The ballots will be mailed on or before June 4th and counted on June 28th. I would like to express my thanks to Tony, Nicole, and Jarred, for stepping forward to conduct this important election.

The person elected, along with the Local President, will comprise the Local 323 Delegation to the LIUNA Conventions. That Convention will be held virtually over two days in September.

Upcoming Events:

LIUNA Delegate Election Ballot Count – June 28th
Picnic ????????????

Fraternally,

Jeff Larsen
Local President

cc: All Branches
File