

National Business Agent's Report
Mike Weir
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One of the questions I am most frequently asked as I travel around the region is: when will the PTFs make regular? While there is no easy or certain answer, I believe we are beginning to see progress toward achieving that goal. As I have discussed in previous articles, assignments are being withheld across the country for a variety of events, including: FSS impacts, plant and BMC closures or consolidations, route adjustments, etc. Article 12 requires that management withhold a sufficient number of assignments to accommodate the potential excessing of regular employees from their bid assignments or even, in some instances, from their installations. Due to the extensive nature of the excessing events and the subsequent withholding activity, the standard withholding radius of one hundred miles from an affected installation has usually expanded to several hundred miles. Circles within circles that intersect other circles developed to the point that the entire country was, essentially, under withholding. These conditions resulted in PTFs waiting extended periods of time for conversion opportunities.

In withholding letters, which are provided to the affected unions, management cites their estimate of the number of assignments which need to be withheld within the established radius. As is generally the case with any of their "projections," they tend to overestimate the expected impact. Additionally, for the most part, they do not seem to have a clue as to when they have actually withheld the needed assignments for the excessing event. As I am sure you are aware, this is not completely unexpected. However, it is extremely important that we have this information. Once the cited number of assignments has been identified, management has no further entitlement to withholding for that event and would be required to begin converting PTFs to regular. At the national level, we have been compiling a database of excessing events and withheld positions in order to hold management's feet to the fire regarding their ongoing entitlement to withhold versus the obligation to convert

PTFs. At the regional level, as a result of the data we have amassed for inclusion in the national database, we have been better able to track these issues and push management to begin the conversion process in a number of locations.

With the completion of FSS adjustments in the Mid-America District, we have seen significant movement toward converting PTFs. Additionally, throughout the region, with much of the withholding being based upon potential clerk excessing, we have been able to release T-6 assignments and effect conversions as a result. There continue to be many locations where routes are being withheld for clerk excessing events, and we are still receiving new withholding letters periodically for these types of events. Currently, we are assessing the propriety of these withholdings and filing grievances, as necessary, to ensure contractual compliance. I know this has been a long, drawn-out process, but I ask for your patience as we move forward with our efforts on behalf of Region 5's PTFs.

As I wrote this article, there were two weeks remaining before the mid-term elections. I was totally disgusted with the tone, tenor and blatant inaccuracies of the campaign advertising that assaulted us this time around. Capitalizing on the Supreme Court decision and hiding behind the anonymity of bogus, but benignly-named organizations, corporations opened the floodgates and poured millions of dollars into campaigns to distort the issues and protect their interests. The spending was unprecedented and the implications for the future are frightening. Still, regardless of the election results, I want to thank the many letter carriers and union activists who sifted through the nonsense, recognized the importance of protecting our interests and gave their time, energy and money in support of candidates who would hold corporations accountable for their excesses and would move forward on a progressive agenda for working men and women.

This month, we celebrate two holidays. Each embodies more than just a break from the physical and emotional toll that our jobs impose on us. On Veterans

Day, we should remember and honor the men and women who have sacrificed so much to ensure that we have the freedom to vote and the opportunity to work toward a more just and open society for all of our fellow citizens. Members of the Armed Forces are currently serving throughout the world, many under extremely dangerous conditions. Keep them in your thoughts for a safe return to their families and friends.

Food tends to be a focal point for the second holiday, but Thanksgiving is much more than just an opportunity to gorge on turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes and every pie imaginable (although there is certainly something to be said for that!). This is a time for families and friends to gather together to give thanks for each other and to share the stories of their lives, in recognition of the bonds of kinship and the underlying connection of shared affection and love. Such moments and memories engender real family values as opposed to the manufactured platitudes that surface during election campaigns. In that spirit, I wish you and yours all the best during your holiday and family celebrations.

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