

# Richardson County Road Workers Negotiations Timeline

October 2022-December 2025

## Events Leading Up to Negotiations

### June 2022

County Commissioner David Sickel tells union steward Jimmy Coonce that the county wanted to give the roads workers a raise, and the union should request it.

### July 2022

Highway Superintendent Steve Darveau told union member Matt Bletscher that the commissioners would give union members a 10% raise, and that the union needed to send Jimmy Coonce to the County Commissioners meeting to request it.

### July 2022

Jimmy Coonce went to the commissioners meeting to request the increase on behalf of the union. Commissioner Sickel told Mr. Coonce that there was nothing wrong with the current contract. Mr. Darveau told Mr. Coonce later the same day that union members had rejected the 10% raise. Mr. Darveau told Mr. Coonce that if there was no union, the employees could get the raise.

### August 2022

Commissioner Karas went to the Dawson Road Shop and told union president Bryan Dettmann to have the union send a letter to the commissioners asking for a raise. Dettmann told Karas that the Commissioners could simply offer the raise instead. Commissioner Karas said he "didn't think it should take an act of Congress to get someone a raise, but it must with a union."

### September 2022

The union filed a prohibited practice charge with the Nebraska CIR alleging that the Commissioners and management violated the Nebraska Industrial Relations Act by its conduct in the summer of 2022.

### May 2023

The union requests to begin contract negotiations in accordance with Article 17.2 of the contract that will expire in June 2023. The county refuses, citing the pending prohibited practices charge at the CIR.

### August 2023

The CIR clarifies that bargaining for a successor agreement may begin. The county offers October 4 as its first available date to meet.

### October 2023

Initial proposals are exchanged, but the county does not want to further bargain until the prohibited practices case is resolved.

### November 2023

CIR resolves the prohibited practice case, finding that while the county's actions were troubling, it did not amount to a prohibited practice. The CIR suggests the union could have simply sent the letter to the commissioners as requested.

### November 2023

The union lets the county know that it will not appeal the CIR decision and is ready to continue negotiations immediately. The county responds that its next available date for negotiations is January 24, 2024. February 7, 2024 was set as the first negotiations session.

### February 2024

**February 7** - The first negotiations session is held without an agreement being reached.  
**February 14** - At the second negotiations session, the county presented the union with its final offer, which was substantially the same as the first offer.  
**February 21** - NAPE offers to continue negotiating to reach an agreement.

## March 2024

The county refuses to negotiate further.

## April 2024

**April 2** - The union offers to enter federal mediation.  
**April 10** - The county agrees to enter mediation. The county agrees to begin mediation on May 29, 2024. The county later cancels the mediation sessions and offers to reschedule on June 18, 2024.

## June 2024

**June 18** - A mediation session is held with a mediator from the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service. After 90 minutes, the mediator informs the union the county is no longer willing to negotiate or continue with mediation.  
**June 21** - NAPE files an impasse petition at the Nebraska CIR.

## January 2025

The CIR orders the trial to be held in two parts. The first phase will determine the comparable counties, the second part will set wages.

## March 2025

Phase 1 trial is held.

## August 2025

The CIR selects comparable counties of Saline, Jefferson, Johnson, Nemaha, Butler, Colfax, and York.

## September 2025

The county proposes a settlement offer, which is substantially the same as its original proposal. NAPE counter offers leaving the expired contract in place, and settling the dispute with a \$2/hour raise effective July 1, 2023, a \$2/hour raise effective July 1, 2024, and a \$2/hour raise effective July 1, 2025. The county rejects this offer.

## October 2025

The CIR sets January 8 & 9, 2026 as the final trial date.

## Costs

- **Prior to the March 2025 phase 1 trial date, the County Commissioners spent more than \$140,000 in legal fees according to the Flatwater Free Press.**
- **Since March 2025, the County has paid an additional \$80,000 in legal fees, bringing the total so far to \$220,000.**
- **An annual \$2/hour raise for 20 employees would cost \$83,200/year. (\$2 x 2,080 hours x 20)**

