



National Academy of Arbitrators (NAA) – Southwest/Rockies Region  
46th Annual Labor-Management Conference  
For Arbitrators and Practitioners

**FEBRUARY 19-21, 2026**

Marriott Houston South at Hobby Airport - 9100 Gulf Fwy, Houston, TX 77017

**Navigating Change: Tools, Trends, and Technology**

**Thursday, Feb. 19, 2026**

**FULL-DAY TRAINING TRACKS, PLENARY: BELOW THE WING  
& LERA DINNER TALK**

**8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.** – Registration Open

**9:00 a.m.** – Opening Remarks/Welcome, **Paul Chapdelaine**,\* Chair, NAA Southwest / Rockies Region, *League City, TX*

\* Indicates a member of the National Academy of Arbitrators

**9:00 a.m. – 10:15 p.m.**

**(A) ARBITRATOR TRAINING – For Practicing Neutrals Only**

Instructors: **Will Hartsfield**,\* Esq., *Dallas, TX*; **Danielle L. Hargrove**,\* Esq., *Dallas, TX*; **I. B. (Beber) Helburn**,\* Ph.D., *Austin, TX*.

**Topic/Description: Ask Your Colleagues** – Arbitrators share insights and recommendations in an all-day Arbitrator Training drawn exclusively from real-life case scenarios offered by our Arbitrator colleagues in the SWR Region and elsewhere. This training is intended for practicing Arbitrators at all levels of experience and will address issues arising at each stage in the life cycle of an arbitration matter.

**(B) ADVOCATE TRAINING – For Advocates**

Instructors: **Kathy Fragnoli**\*, Esq., *San Diego, CA*; Presenters: **Paul Chapdelaine**\*, Chair, NAA Southwest/Rockies Region, *League City, TX*; **Ruben Armendariz**\*, *Boerne, TX*. **Rick Bales**\*, Esq., *Lima, OH*; **Carl Bosland**\*, Esq., *San Diego, CA*; **Edward Valverde**\*, *Hurst, TX*; **Gary Fowler**, Esq., *Dallas, TX*.

**Topic/Description:** The ABC's of Presenting a Case before an arbitrator. Tips for a good opening. The Rules of Evidence simplified. Preparing a closing argument. The afternoon will provide students with a chance to participate in a mock arbitration at their tables.

**10:15 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. MORNING BREAK**

**10:30 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.**

**(A) ARBITRATOR TRAINING – CONTINUED**

**(B) ADVOCATE TRAINING – CONTINUED**

**12:15 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. LUNCH**

**1:30 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.**

**(A) ARBITRATOR TRAINING – CONTINUED**

**(B) ADVOCATE TRAINING – CONTINUED**

**3:15 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. BREAK**

**3:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. BELOW THE WING – A NEW MODEL OF ARBITRATION FOR EMPLOYEES OUTSIDE THE CABIN AND COCKPIT\***

Moderator: **Paul Chapdelaine\***, Chair, NAA Southwest/Rockies Region, *League City, TX*.  
Presenter: **Brian Clauss\***, Esq., *St. Charles, IL*; Panelists: **Jennifer Traylor**, Southwest Airlines, Director of Labor Administration, *Dallas-Ft. Worth, TX*; **Tony Slavings**, President, Transportation Workers Union Local 555, *Kansas City, MO*; **Tyler Cluff**, Vice President, Transport Workers Union Local 555, *Phoenix, AZ*; **Michelle Hopkins**, Southwest Airlines, Advocate, *Dallas-Fort Worth, TX*.

**Topic/Discussion:** The employees who move the luggage and cargo, clean the cabins, stock the galleys, staff the gates and terminals, and perform all the other jobs that ensure the airlines can effectively operate are the focus. Panelists will discuss issues and resolution, trends, and dispute resolution processes.

\*This session is also open to those who register for Friday, February 20, 2026.

**5:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. MEET THE ARBITRATORS' SOCIAL HOUR**

An informal opportunity for advocates to meet and mingle with NAA-Southwest Rockies Region arbitrators; Cash Bar & Hors d'oeuvres

**6:00 p.m. HOUSTON LERA-SPONSORED DINNER & TALK: Face-to-Face or Face-to-Screen: Weighing the Pros and Cons of Hearing Formats.**

**Facilitator:** **Walter Darr**, Neutral, National Mediation & Conflict Services, *Bellaire, TX*;  
**Panelists:** Patrick M. Flynn, Esq., *Houston, TX*; Joseph G. (Chip) Galagaza, Esq., Stibbs & Co., P.C., *Spring, TX*; A. John Harper III, Esq., Littler, *Houston, TX*; Micah Heilbrun, Manager, Labor & Employee Relations, Phillips 66, *Houston, TX*; Renée Mayne, Arbitrator, *Grass Valley, CA*; Charlie Singletary, Business Manager, International Union of Operating Engineers Local 564, *Richwood, TX*; Betty R. Widgeon\*, Esq., *Ann Arbor, MI*

**Topic/Discussion: Step Into the Future of Labor Arbitration!**

This interactive session explores the evolving post-pandemic landscape of labor arbitration hearings. A panel of arbitrators and advocates will weigh the practical, procedural, and strategic pros and cons of remote vs. in-person formats—including cost, convenience, tech access, credibility, and due process. Attendees can expect candid insights and lively discussion on when each format works best.

**Friday, Feb. 20, 2026**

**PLENARIES, WORKSHOPS & PANELING AGENCY UPDATE**

**8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.** – Registration Open

**9:00 a.m.** – Opening Remarks/Welcome, **Paul Chapdelaine\***, Chair, NAA Southwest / Rockies Region, *League City, TX*

**9:15 a.m. – 10:15 a.m. PLENARY: The Second Trump Administration and Labor-Management Relations**

Moderator: **Rick Bales\***, Esq. *Lima, OH*; Panelists: **Rodolfo R. (Fito) Agraz**, Esq., *Ogletree, Dallas, TX*; **Patrick Flynn**, Esq., *Houston, TX*; **Gretchen Paulig**, Esq., *NTEU, Austin, TX*

**Topic/Description:** This workshop examines developments in labor-management relations during the Trump Administration, with an emphasis on practical implications for labor relations professionals and arbitrators. Topics include the effects of executive orders and administrative actions on collective bargaining, due process rights, and union representation in both the private and federal sectors, as well as notable shifts in the enforcement of labor laws by the federal regulatory agencies, including the NLRB, FLRA, MSPB, and EEOC. Participants will gain a clearer understanding of how these changes have affected grievance procedures, contract interpretation, and arbitration practice.

**10:15 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. BREAK**

**10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. PLENARY: RED LIGHT- GREEN LIGHT**

Moderator: **Tom Cipolla\***, Esq., *Austin, TX*. Panelists: **Ruben Armendariz\***, *Boerne, TX*; **Rick Bales\***, Esq. *Lima, OH*; **Diego Pena\***, Esq., *Bedford, TX*; **Edward Valverde\***, Esq., *Hurst, TX*

**Topic/Description:** This session will feature a panel of four arbitrators addressing realistic hypothetical cases. Following a presentation of the hypothetical, the arbitrators will vote: Red light, grievance denied, or Green light, grievance sustained, followed by a discussion of why they voted the way they did.

**12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. LUNCH AND KEYNOTE SPEAKER**

Speaker: **NAA President Joshua M. Javits\***, Esq., *Media, PA*.

**Topic/Description: The Changing Demands for Workplace Dispute Resolution.** The workplace is transforming faster than ever, driven by artificial intelligence, robotics, social media, and the rise of remote and hybrid work. These forces are redefining how conflicts emerge—and how they must be resolved. In this dynamic keynote, NAA President Javits will share forward-looking insights on how the neutral community is rising to meet these challenges. From preparing and mentoring the next generation of arbitrators to shaping national policy through impactful amicus briefs, the Academy is at the forefront of innovation in dispute resolution. This is a must-attend session for anyone seeking to understand where workplace arbitration is headed—and how the NAA is leading the way.

**1:30 p.m. – 2:45 p.m. CONCURRENT WORKSHOPS**

**Master the Fundamentals of the Railway Labor Act**

**Presenter: Sidney Moreland\***, Esq. *Baton Rouge, Louisiana*

**Topic/Description:** The Railway Labor Act provides the framework for labor relations in the airline and railroad industries. In this workshop, Arbitrator Sidney Moreland draws from his new treatise, *Railway Labor Act – A Source for Practitioners*, to distill the fundamentals of the Act—covering statutory coverage, bargaining structures, dispute resolution, and representation issues. Designed for arbitrators and advocates who already handle RLA cases, or those seeking to expand their practice, this session delivers essential knowledge and practical resources to strengthen effectiveness in the hearing room and award writing.

**Bend a Word: Contract Interpretation Principles You Need to Know**

**Presenter: Diego Pena\***, Esq., *Bedford, TX*

**Topic/Description:** This interactive workshop explores the foundational principles labor arbitrators rely upon when interpreting collective bargaining agreements. Participants will examine canons of construction, including plain meaning, specific over general, ejusdem generis, expressio unius, and the avoidance of absurd results. The session also addresses the interpretive role of bargaining history, past practice, and external law. Through hypotheticals and sample clauses, attendees will sharpen their interpretive skills and gain practical insights into how subtle differences in contract language can significantly affect outcomes. A must-attend for new and experienced arbitrators aiming to elevate their award writing and decision rationale.

**Postal Update**

Moderator: **Ruben Armendariz\***, *Boerne, TX*. Panelists: **Jennifer Breslin**, Esq., USPS Labor Relations, *Washington DC*; **John C. Adams**, NRLCA, *Kansas City, MO*; **Charlie Cash**, APWU, *Washington, DC*; **Eileen Mills**, NPMHU, *Washington, DC*; **Dan Toth**, NALC, *Washington, DC*.

**Topic/Description:** The panelists will provide attendees with an update on the status of contract negotiations. They will also explain how the outcomes of those negotiations could affect our work on the USPS-APWU, USPS-NALC, USPS-NPMHU, and USPS-NRLCA arbitration panels.

**2:45 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.            BREAK**

**3:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.            CONCURRENT WORKSHOPS**

**Fire and Police Arbitration Update**

Moderator: **Will Hartsfield**,\* Esq., *Dallas, TX*. Panelists: **Michael Z. Green**,\* Esq., *Ft. Worth, TX*; **Diego J. Peña**,\* Esq., *Bedford, TX*; **Patricia H. McGruder**, Esq., *Arlington, TX*.

**Topic/Description:** Topics to be discussed include cause for discipline, inconsistent discipline, due process, remedies, evidentiary rules, use of texts and videos, authentication issues, and the use of AI.

**AI for Advocates and Arbitrators: A Live Demonstration**

Presenter: **Carl C. Bosland**\*, Esq. *San Diego, C*

**Topic/Description:** This interactive workshop offers a front-row seat to the future of dispute resolution. Designed for both labor advocates and arbitrators, the session showcases live demonstrations of cutting-edge AI tools that assist in case preparation, witness examination, contract interpretation, and decision drafting. Attendees will gain practical insight into how AI enhances efficiency, consistency, and persuasive advocacy—while preserving fairness and professional judgment. No prior technical experience required.

**Ethics**

Discussion Leader: **Walt DeTreux**\*, Esq., President-Elect, National Academy of Arbitrators, *Philadelphia, PA*

**Topic/Description:** This interactive session will focus on a variety of ethical issues in arbitration and is intended to qualify for CLE credit in Texas.

**4:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.            PANELING AGENCY UPDATE**

Moderator: **Arthur Perlstein**\*, Esq., *Arlington, VA*; Panels: **Frank Binda**., Assistant V.P., American Arbitration Association, *Johnston, RI*; **Terri D. Brown**, Esq., Director of Arbitration Services, National Mediation Board (NMB), *Washington, DC*; **Jan Teehan**, Director, The Labor Relations Connection, Inc.; **Gary Fowler**, Esq., Arbitrator/Mediator @ Judicial Arbitration and Mediation Services (JAMS), *Dallas-Ft. Worth, TX*

**Topic/Description:** Agency representatives will brief arbitrators and advocates on recent policy updates, organizational changes, and other pertinent matters.

**Saturday, Feb. 21, 2026**

**8:00 a.m. – 10:00 p.m.            NAA-SWR BUSINESS MEETING**

**10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.            POSTAL SCRUM**

Convenor: **Steve Stromquist**, Arbitrator, *Minneapolis, MN*

**Topic/Description:** This traditional Saturday session affords an “open mike” to address any aspect of postal arbitration.

**ON-LINE REGISTRATION INFORMATION.** To register online and receive more information about our region and this program, go to [www.naaswr.org](http://www.naaswr.org). Please register by January 20, 2026, to avoid late fees.

The Southwest-Rockies Region invites law, graduate, and undergraduate students to attend this Conference at 50% off the registration fee. This discount covers the Thursday Advocate training and Friday plenary sessions and workshops. Travel, lodging, and the Thursday dinner are not included. To apply, register via the Conference website or email the Registrar. You'll need to provide proof of current enrollment and a brief statement of interest—or a recommendation from any NAA member. Once approved, you will receive a discount code to use when registering on line.

Credit cards are accepted on the website or by contacting Ruben Armendariz at (210) 379-0860. Absolutely no refunds after February 8, 2026.

Email the Region for a paper registration form, if needed: [swrockies7@gmail.com](mailto:swrockies7@gmail.com). For mail-in registration, make checks payable to: Southwest/Rockies Region NAA, and mail to: Ruben Armendariz, Registrar, NAA-SWR, 29010 Pfeiffers Gate, Fair Oaks Ranch, TX 78015

## SPONSORS

We are grateful for our sponsors' support and look forward to a successful 2026 Conference!

### CONFERENCE CO-SPONSOR:

**JAMS: Mediation, Arbitration and ADR Services** [www.jamsadr.com](http://www.jamsadr.com)



A leading provider of mediation and arbitration services, JAMS is proud to support the advancement of labor and employment arbitration.

### CONFERENCE FRIEND:

**The Labor Relations Connection, Inc.**



Providing professional dispute resolution between Unions and Employers.

### CONFERENCE SUPPORTERS:

**Greater Houston Labor and Employment Relations Association (Houston LERA )**  
[www.lerachapter.org/houston/](http://www.lerachapter.org/houston/) 

Promoting dialogue and education in labor and employment relations in the Greater Houston area.

**American Arbitration Association** [www.adr.org](http://www.adr.org)



Supporting fair and efficient dispute resolution worldwide

### REGISTRATION FEES CALCULATION

Please check the specific training session you wish to attend.

**Thursday, February 19, 2026**

[\*] Rate for each of four or more attending from one organization

Registration	Regular Reg. (thru 01/20/2026) Ind./Group*	Late Reg. (after 01/20/2026) Ind./Group*	# Attending	Amt. Due
Advocate Training	\$160/\$150	\$195/\$185		
Arbitrator Training ***	\$160/\$150	\$195/\$185		
Dinner	\$55.00	\$55.00		

\*\*\*The Arbitrator Training Session is for "Neutrals" only!

**Friday, February 20, 2026 [\*] Rate for each  
of four or more attending from one  
organization**

Plenary Sessions & Workshops	Regular Reg. (thru 01/28/2026) Ind./Group*	Late Reg. (after 01/20/2026) Ind./Group*	# Attending	Amt. Due
Total	\$160/\$150	\$195/\$185		

<b>Total for February 20 and 21, 2025</b>	\$
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**HOTEL REGISTRATION.** Use this link to register online for the Hotel, Marriott Houston South at Hobby Airport: Atrium Hospitality Portfolio:

**Book your group rate for National Academy of Arbitrators Southwest**

If you can't access the URL directly, copy and paste this URL in your browser and access it that way: <https://www.marriott.com/event-reservations/reservation-link.mi?id=1751303112472&key=GRP&app=resvlink>

Map of Hotel Locations: <https://viewer.mapme.com/atriumhospitality>

The hotel – Marriott Houston South at Hobby Airport – is located eight minutes (3.4 miles) from the Houston Hobby Airport and has been recently renovated. The hotel address is 9100 Gulf Freeway. Complimentary shuttle service to and from Hobby Airport is provided.

The hotel has reserved a limited block of rooms at the nightly group rate of \$124 for a standard room plus taxes, subject to availability. All reservations should be received by the hotel no later than January 28, 2026. Reservation requests received by the hotel after January 28, 2026, are subject to space and rate availability. Check-in time is 3:00 p.m. For phone reservations, call [\(713\) 943-7979](tel:7139437979) and provide Group Code NAA to receive the group rate.

#### **CLE CREDITS (INCLUDING ETHICS)**

Application has been made to the State Bars of **Oklahoma** and **Texas** for participatory hours of MCLE, including 1.0 hour for ethics.

#### **2026 PROGRAM COMMITTEE**

Chair: Carl C. Bosland,\*Esq.  
Vice Chair: Kathy Fragnoli\*  
Ruben Armendariz\*  
Danielle Hargrove,\*Esq.  
Will Hartsfield,\* Esq.,

#### **2025 ADVOCATE TRAINING CHAIRS**

Kathy Fragnoli\*, Esq.

#### **2024/2025 ARBITRATOR TRAINING CO-CHAIRS**

Will Hartsfield\*, Esq.; Danielle Hargrove,\*Esq.

#### **2024/2025 ARRANGEMENTS LIAISON**

Region Chair, Paul Chapdelaine\*  
Danielle Hargrove,\*Esq.