

Reflections on a pandemic that brought out the best in us



**Brian
Renfro**

A little over a year ago, I wrote a column in this magazine about activism during a pandemic. That article was written in early May 2020. At that time, we were all aware of the present dangers and difficulties that the COVID-19 pandemic caused. Letter carriers were keenly aware as we continued to deliver for our customers. Few, if any, of us could imagine what would take place over the 12 months that followed.

The COVID-19 pandemic became worse. In an election year, it became very political, as most issues do. Regardless of anyone's opinion on the pandemic, political or otherwise, millions experienced sick-

ness and hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives over the rest of 2020 and into 2021. Unfortunately, these included letter carriers and NALC members. We continue to mourn those losses. Each is memorialized on the NALC website in our virtual memorial. I encourage you to take a look at it if you haven't already.

“This pandemic has created scenarios that most of us never thought would be a part of our daily lives. It is a testament to the dedication of letter carriers that we have delivered throughout this pandemic and will continue to do so until it is over.”

The summer of 2020 will hopefully be remembered for the growth of awareness of racial and social injustice in our country. Millions took to the streets to righteously protest these injustices. Unfortunately, some protests were marred by the violence of a small percentage of participants. This violence should be unequivocally condemned, but should never cloud the recognition of the injustices that exist and of the continuing need to address these injustices so as to achieve justice and eliminate racism. The labor movement and NALC members stood up and took action, and we continue to stand with our members to make real progress on these issues that have plagued us for far too long.

While it is still too early to make an historical judgment, the country saw considerable political tumult play out in the 2020 general election and the months that followed. Letter carriers and NALC played a big role in the increased use of vote-by-mail to keep voters safe during a pandemic by giving them access to fair and secure voting through the mail. We did our job and delivered for America during the 2020 election.

The months of lies and false allegations about our election systems, including the Postal Service, culminated in the disgusting events of Jan. 6. Congress was in the process of doing its constitutional duty to certify election results when a mob of people violently broke into the Capitol to disrupt a process that is at the core of our democracy. The images of that day are still surreal and will not be forgotten.

The COVID-19 pandemic is not over. There are still safety and health dangers associated with the pandemic out there, and likely will be for some time. Thankfully, the number of illnesses and deaths from COVID-19 has decreased recently and a return to some level of normalcy is ongoing.

The pandemic challenged many of our union's functions at the branch, state, regional and national level. Events that had become routine for many years, such as our national convention, the Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive, and the thousands of training sessions and branch and regional meetings were canceled, delayed or altered. As I wrote last year, I had no doubt about how NALC members would respond.

History tells us that the men and women of NALC have risen to many challenges throughout our 130-plus years. Through all the events I mentioned here and the daily grind of working through a pandemic, our members found a way. The core mission of representation of our members has continued at the branch, regional and national levels. The legislative and political activism that I wrote about in the June 2020 *Postal Record* has been as strong as ever.

There is no doubt that this pandemic has created scenarios that most of us never thought would be a part of our daily lives. It is a testament to the dedication of letter carriers that we have delivered through the entire pandemic and will continue to do so until it is over. The men and women who serve in any role with our union have demonstrated an ability to adapt and move forward, despite the circumstances and despite the issues of the day. The dedication and determination of these men and women to represent NALC members makes me proud to be a letter carrier and NALC member. I cherish the privilege to work with you all.