

Let's vote for democracy in 2022



Fredric V. Rolando

We're fortunate to live in a democracy—a country in which power is vested in the people, by the people, and for the people via free elections. Voting rights for all citizens and the peaceful transfer of power are the essence of a healthy democracy—revealing and empowering the will of the people in a government chosen by the people. Belief in democracy should unite us as a country, whether we are Republicans, Democrats or non-affiliated voters. On this most basic concept, we can and must remain politically united.

This November, we once again have the opportunity, privilege and duty to exercise our right to vote in the midterm elections. As postal employees, we have learned that elections have consequences. Members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives have a direct say about our employer, our benefits and our rights on the job. If you doubt that, compare the support we've received and the progress we've made over the past two years (most notably with the enactment of postal reform, permanent six-day delivery, and an absence of proposed cuts to our health and pension benefits) to what we experienced in the immediately preceding years. But it seems to me that there is something much bigger than postal policy and budget politics at stake in this year's elections. I feel like the health and future stability of our democracy is on the line as well.

If you have been paying attention to the hearings of the U.S. House Select Committee on the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol in Washington, you know just how close we came to losing our democracy last year. The lack of a peaceful transfer of power, the hallmark of American democracy since the Civil War, is bad enough. But to learn from testimony from bipartisan witnesses that there were multiple and overlapping attempts to reverse the results of a free and fair election is disturbing. And it is alarming that there are those who still believe that the 2020 presidential election was stolen—contrary to all the evidence from bipartisan officials directly involved with the elections.

Equally concerning, a recent poll by Gallup shows that the level of Americans' trust in their public institutions—Congress, the White House, the Supreme Court, etc.—is at a record low. This is not a good sign for our democracy. Many democratic countries around the world are being similarly threatened with a loss of

confidence—paving the way for a rise in authoritarianism. A story from a colleague from our global trade union federation—UNI Post & Logistics—provides a good example. She told me what Hungary's anti-democratic government did before its recent election. It banned the Hungarian Post Office from delivering any political mail for any of the political parties—and then signed contracts with all the major private delivery companies to deliver only the governing party's political mail. Imagine if, in 2020, when we delivered more than a billion pieces of election mail, we had been effectively shut down by the White House. That happened in Hungary, which just years ago was a fully democratic country.

While conditions here certainly have not fallen to that level, we do have reason to be concerned. Since the Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act in 2013, state legislatures across the United States have been enacting laws to make it more difficult for their people to vote. In 2021 alone, 34 laws to restrict voting rights were passed in 19 states, according to the Brennan Center for Justice.

Viewed in this broader context, these anti-democratic trends at home should be a wake-up call. Democracy is not guaranteed. Even in the United States, where we are proud to be the world's longest-lasting democracy, it can fail if not tended to.

Some unprincipled politicians in our country seem content to undermine democracy—by making election administration a partisan issue. We can't allow that to happen. While we embrace our personal views based on our differing social, economic and partisan political interests, we must at the same time embrace the shared values and core concepts of our republic—the equality of all citizens, liberty for all, the rule of law, and a government of the people. Among all the other important issues to be considered in the 2022 midterms, democracy itself is also on the ballot.

I fervently believe that no matter whom we vote for or why, it is essential that we recommit ourselves to democracy by participating in it. Registering to vote, educating ourselves on the issues and casting our ballots are essential to this commitment. Please urge your families, friends and neighbors to vote as well. The process is just as important as the results.

At our convention in Chicago, we will distribute wristbands with a simple message on them: "I'm Voting for Democracy in 2022." We will ask delegates to bring some of these wristbands home to share with their brothers and sisters in their branches. By wearing these wristbands, we can highlight our shared values and our union's commitment to democracy. By voting, we can begin the hard work of restoring confidence in our public institutions—and send a message that we won't let democracy fail on our watch.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fredric Rolando".