

# The long road to Chicago goes through Honolulu...and a pandemic



**Fredric V. Rolando**

**T**he NALC's 72nd Biennial Convention is just weeks away. Four years out from our last national convention, the officers and staff of our great union are working hard to prepare for a successful and *safe* convention, even as the COVID-19 pandemic stretches into its third year. It still pains me that we had to cancel the 72nd Biennial Convention in Honolulu, especially after Branch 860 did such an outstanding job getting ready to host the thousands of delegates who were elected to represent their branches in 2020. We literally had no choice but to cancel our plans to convene in Hawaii—large public meetings were banned in Ameri-

ca's 50th state in the summer of 2020 by public health authorities. This summer, we have a choice, and thankfully, this year, we can finally meet again by taking all the necessary precautions.

As of this writing, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reported that the risk of COVID-19 infections in Chicago is "High," with new reported cases per 100,000 residents standing at 248 during the week ending June 10—slightly above the goal of 200 cases per 100,000 residents. However, because the number of cases requiring hospitalization and the percentage of staffed hospital beds being used are well below the CDC's goals (fewer than 10 cases and less than 10 percent of beds), the Executive Council has decided not to cancel our Chicago convention, opting instead to proceed with heightened public health measures to keep all our delegates and guests safe. Proof of vaccination and mask-wearing in the crowded convention center will be mandated. We have lost far too many members in this terrible pandemic and so many others have been made terribly sick. We want to do all we can to be both productive *and* safe in August.

There have been 21 conventions since I joined the NALC. Remarkably, this will be the first convention for more than a third of our union's active membership—the percentage of currently active city carriers hired since the Detroit convention in 2018.

**So, now might be a good time to remember why conventions are so important to the NALC.** Most significantly, the convention is the supreme decision-making body in our democratic union, as provided by the *NALC Constitution*. The delegates elected to serve in Chicago by their branches and state associations have the power to amend the constitution

regarding the governance and functioning of our union. They also will set the union's agenda and policies for the next two years. And they will nominate candidates for the positions of 10 resident national officers, three trustees and 15 national business agents, who together make up the union's Executive Council. The winners of contested offices will be chosen in our national union election in the fall.

The agenda-setting and policymaking functions of the convention will be achieved through democratic debate throughout the week of Aug. 8-12 about dozens of resolutions submitted by branches and state associations. These resolutions will cover a wide range of topics, from our goals and positions in the next round of collective bargaining to our priorities for legislative action and our approach to policies set by a variety of government agencies that regulate the Postal Service—including the Department of Labor and the Postal Regulatory Commission. Amendments to the *NALC Constitution* will be debated on the second day of the convention, and nominations for union office will be taken up the third day.

Of course, the convention involves more than the daily five-hour general sessions. It also will provide a broad array of training and educational opportunities. Dozens of workshops will be offered both before and after the Monday-through-Thursday general sessions—at 7:30 a.m. and at 3:15 p.m. each day. The workshops will cover, among other topics, the administration of our labor contract with USPS, new developments affecting city delivery, the NALC's Health Benefit Plan and Mutual Benefit Association programs, workers' compensation, our plans to mobilize to support pro-letter carrier candidates for Congress and several aspects of union communications. Meanwhile, we will hear from a variety of speakers on these subjects, and we will welcome guests from other unions that are affiliated with NALC through the AFL-CIO and UNI Global Union.

The Chicago convention also will provide an opportunity to celebrate—two years too late, thanks to COVID-19—the 50th anniversary of the Great Postal Strike of 1970, which resulted in collective-bargaining rights for U.S. postal employees. We will present a new film on the strike and display an historical exhibit on the NALC walkout at the convention center.

**Perhaps most importantly, the Chicago convention will give every delegate a chance to build the bonds of solidarity with NALC activists and leaders from every corner of the country.** Those connections of dedication to the cause of unionism and affection have made the NALC the best organized open-shop union in the United States. This is our super power—the source of our strength and effectiveness as a union. The theme of our 72nd convention will be "A Union of Essential Workers." We are indeed. Chicago, here we come.