

Our place in the labor movement



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Unions are having a moment. Having worked in the labor movement in Washington, DC, for more than 20 years, I feel the energy and momentum. In his President's Message, President Renfro mentioned examples of labor showing up for one another. The idea of "your fight is my fight" is the labor movement's guiding force.

When I began lobbying on Capitol Hill, in some rooms there was outright disdain for unions. There were misconceptions about whom we represent, how we work, who pays for it, what we do—or more accurately, misunderstanding of what we don't do. But, in every misconception was an opportunity to correct the record. Not everyone gets it, and we still find ourselves educating some on Capitol Hill and elsewhere. But every teaching opportunity opened a door. Eventually, the number of open doors allowed us to celebrate the enactment of the Postal Service Reform Act (PSRA) in 2022.

Now, more than a year later, we have a lot of open doors, new friends and allies. We find ourselves uniquely positioned to advance other priorities—which you can read about in News from Washington every month in this magazine. We also find ourselves in a pre-2024 election landscape, which affects how those doors may swing open and closed. We have built something powerful, and it's incumbent on us to keep those doors open to advance current and future priorities while continuing to build power for our members from the workroom floor to the bargaining table to the White House.

The question then becomes, how do we leverage what we have built to strengthen not only NALC but also other unions in their fights?

A poll released by the AFL-CIO last month found that 88 percent of Americans aged 30 and younger approved of unions, emphasizing the strength of the future of labor. Similarly, a majority believe unions are having a positive impact on workplace safety, better pay, benefits and the economy. And 75 percent support workers in the private sector going on strike. The public recognizes the value of worker protection through collective bargaining.

In August, the Department of Treasury's Office of Economic Policy released the report "Labor Unions and the Economy," which highlighted the benefits

unions have on the economy. The report was a result of the White House Task Force on Worker Organizing and Empowerment, which was convened with members of the labor movement following the election of President Joe Biden and which is chaired by Vice President Kamala Harris. The task force set out to advance worker-friendly priorities, such as the Richard Trumka Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act to promote collective bargaining.

The Treasury report, which was the first of its kind from the agency, found that unions increase workers' wages by an average of 10 to 15 percent. By improving retirement plans, workplace grievance policies and predictable schedules, unions boost the financial stability of the middle class, and in turn the stability of the economy. Unions produce safer and more diverse workplaces while boosting working productivity. In addition, the report outlined both legislative and administrative actions to build the labor movement, such as passage of the PRO Act and corresponding Public Sector Freedom to Negotiate Act; increased funding for the National Labor Relations Board; promotion of prevailing wage required by the Inflation Reduction Act; the use of existing authority within agencies to increase awareness on collective bargaining; increased tracking of agency spending on union organizing by the Department of Labor's Office of Labor Management Standards (OLMS); the informal establishment of a service for newly organized workers and their employers; and the exploring of potential changes in the tax code to eliminate tax breaks for employers engaged in union-busting.

Worker protection is clearly a popular concept, and one that NALC succeeds at. Protection is the reason our union is organized at more than 94 percent. This is our union's power and our strength.

Protection at all levels is what we do.

We can't allow anyone to be left behind in our union or in the larger labor movement. It's why we engage with the Postal Service on many initiatives; why we show up in Bessemer, AL, for Amazon workers attempting to organize; why we join rallies and picket lines across the country; and why we stand in solidarity with all workers.

Even so, fighting for letter carriers' interests remains Priority No. 1. Every time I step into a room of stakeholders, whether it be business, labor or politicians, I am humbled by the respect that exists for our members and our leaders around the country. I'm grateful to serve this union while we navigate every challenge and every success vital to our mission.