2017 National Conference, Part 2:

Rolando discusses postal reform, legislative challenges and strategies

The previous NALC Bulletin (No. 17-04, dated June 23) covered the portion of the June 14 National Conference in Atlantic City, N.J. — aka “rap session” — that dealt with NALC President Fredric Rolando’s interactive discussion of the proposed 2016-2019 National Agreement between NALC and the U.S. Postal Service. In Part 1, we reported on the final hour of the morning rap session, which the president began by noting that the 2016 elections gave the United States a one-party government controlling the House, Senate, the White House and the Postal Service. The previous Bulletin covered the session on how we are voters and what we care.

Among the consequences, he said, is the unfortunate resumption of a number of anti-union and anti-postal proposals. He laid out in stark terms the all-out assault on federal and postal employees presented in President Donald Trump’s first budget proposal:

• up to 6.45 percent in pay cuts resulting from proposals to raise Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) pension contributions.
• proposed elimination of FERS COLAs for current and future retirees and the proposed reduction in Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) COLAs by 0.5 percent per year.
• plans to reduce FERS benefits for future retirees by eliminating the “Social Security supplement” for employees who retire before age 62 and by adopting a high–average salary base in the benefit formula (instead of the high–average under current law).
• renewed attacks on city career jobs in the form of proposals to reduce Saturday and door delivery.

“We face real risks,” Rolando said. “Our collective-bargaining agreements could be negated and our ability to collectively bargain could be taken away by Congress. I’m concerned.”

We also have to be at the top of our game, legislatively, he said. “We need a steady stream of letter carriers contacting their members of Congress — visiting district field offices, making phone calls, sending letters and e-mails, and attending town hall meetings.”

The effort to organize and mobilize NALC members in this fight needs to be led by the state associations, he said, with the full support and activism of the union’s local branches.

“This is not just an exercise,” Rolando said. “This is a reality—scary stuff and very real, a consequence of an election that left us with no checks and balances in Washington.”

All federal workers could soon feel the implications as appointments get made to a variety of boards and commissions that have a direct effect on federal employees.

“That’s why our legislative network has to be working at an optimum level,” he said.

Postal reform

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“Enemies of USPS consistently use this so-called liability against us, he said, adding that the news media’s narrative sometimes refers to a “failing” or “broke” USPS that “is on the verge of needing a taxpayer bailout” — even though the agency receives no taxpayer money, funding itself through the sale of postage and postal products and services.

To help combat this false message, NALC continues to work with stakeholders in the other postal unions, in the mailing industry and in USPS itself. This coalition’s attempts to forge a path toward finally solving the pre-funding problem seem to have gained some traction with H.R. 766, a postal reform bill introduced earlier in the House of Representatives this year.

There’s a lot of misinformation out there about NALC’s position on this bill, Rolando said. “We have the same positions we’ve always had,” he said, “but having our voices heard requires us to step up and contribute to our common defense.”

But money alone, Rolando said, is not enough. “Politicians respond most to voters and constituents back home,” he said. When letter carriers visit their elected representatives’ district offices, make phone calls, send letters and e-mails and show up at town halls, it sends them a message that we are voters and we care.

“In the coming battle over the 2018 budget and postal reform,” the president said, “this can make all the difference in the world.”

Standing up for each other

Worried about the state of affairs earlier in the conference, President Rolando urged the leaders to take full advantage of the workshops and training to be offered over that afternoon and the following day.

“Don’t leave here without getting all your questions answered,” he said. “Even more importantly, take what you learn here back home to your branches.”

Rolando thanked participants for coming and for their commitment to the NALC. In the battles ahead, he said, “it’s important to remember why we got involved in this union to begin with.”

For most of us, he said, it started very simply: “We witnessed a fellow letter carrier being treated unfairly, so we stepped up to defend that carrier.”

That’s the strength of our great union,” he said. “No matter what our role is, we step up and defend each other.”

More than 1,200 NALC activists attended the conference, a one party government means we need a new legislative strategy—and that includes pushing to move a solid-but-flawed H.R.766 out of the House Oversight Committee,” the committee with jurisdiction over USPS.

Some of the misleading information falsely equates NALC’s desire for the bill to move along in the legislative process with union approval of the bill as written, he said. There’s also misinformation about the bill’s Medicare integration piece.

If you sign on to Medicare at age 64, Rolando said, it becomes your primary medical insurance. “If you’re already enrolled in a private health plan—such as the NALC Health Benefit Plan—that can take care of whatever isn’t covered by Medicare,” he said.

“Medicare integration is not new,” Rolando said, noting that 85 percent of NALC retirees already enroll in Medicare Part A (hospitalization) and B (medical expenses) at age 65. H.R. 766 calls for all postal retirees to do so.

“This proposal is designed to help fix the pre-funding problem,” Rolando said, “but our premise has always been that we are voters and we care.”

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