

# Election yields a Congress divided



**M**uch has been written about November's mid-term elections, both before and after the actual vote, but from our perspective the results can be summed up as follows—highly disappointing, could have been worse, and would have been without labor's campaign efforts.

"Today's a day to be honest," AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said right after the election. "Yesterday's election results are deeply disappointing to the millions of voters who supported working family candidates this year."

Indeed, the results were disappointing on several counts. We risk having a House of Representatives that—driven by ideology and politics—will seek to obstruct administration efforts to revitalize the economy. America cannot afford to stand still for the next two years, nor can it return to the failed policies that brought us to the brink of a second Great Depression in 2008.

Dozens of legislators who support working and middle-class families were defeated last month, often by opponents who favor tax cuts for the wealthy while

showing indifference, or even hostility, to the interests of ordinary people. That will make labor's work more difficult as we fight for a level playing field, for American jobs, and for a better standard of living for average people with job security and secure pensions.

In the House, committee chairmanships will change, often in unhelpful ways. Throughout the labor movement

—with the NALC no exception—there is concern about how the anti-union rhetoric heard so often, and so loudly, in recent months will manifest itself in practical ways.

And, on more personal levels, there is sadness at seeing so many decent, hard-working supporters of a fair economy swept out of office by the wave of anger that motivated many voters. The frustration voters felt is understandable, given the slow pace of the economic recovery, but in many instances it was misdirected.

House members such as Phil Hare of Illinois and Suzanne Kosmas of Florida were good friends to working people, including letter carriers. They will be missed.

While the outcome was not what we had hoped for, it is clear that things could have turned out even worse. Reconsideration by some voters of the choices they faced, the self-destruction of several right-wing Senate candidates, and the decision by Democratic Party officials to shift their resources to districts where prospects seemed better, all contributed to saving some House seats



and, notably, to preventing anti-labor forces from taking over the Senate.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid staved off a challenge from the far right in Nevada to retain his seat, and Rep. Gerry Connolly managed to hold on to his Virginia seat. California and West Virginia were among states where labor made a major difference.

“We letter carriers rolled up our collective sleeves, gave it our all, and in many instances our hard work paid off,” said National Association of Letter Carriers President Fredric Rolando.

If the worst-case scenario was averted, it’s in no small measure attributable to labor’s efforts. Even labor’s adversaries acknowledge the political skills, resources, energy—and foot soldiers—that labor brings year after year to the electoral process, and this campaign was no exception.

Some 200,000 union volunteers, including several thousand from the NALC, distributed 19.4 million fliers while speaking one-on-one with workers at the workplace. They knocked on 8.5 million doors.

Thus informed, union members voted by 64 percent to 36 percent for labor-endorsed candidates. This is down somewhat from the 75 percent figure of the past couple of election cycles, but the overall results also were down. The margin between the vote of union households and the electorate at large remained roughly the same. So, labor was as effective as ever in its effort, especially given the degree of difficulty created by the high unemployment and economic uncertainty affecting many union members.

Looking forward, what does the election mean? Let’s start with what it doesn’t mean. Voters, according to exit polls, were decidedly not calling for a sharp move to the right, for the abolishment of government programs that help people or the elimination of federal agencies such as the Department of Education, or for rolling back the newly imposed oversight on Wall Street and the banks.

As even some Republicans have noted, this election was more about the

Democrats than it was about the Republicans. The GOP sought to turn it into a referendum on the Obama administration and the Democratic Congress, and largely succeeded.

Dissatisfied with the economy and the pace of change, voters did what voters have done now for three successive election cycles—they tossed out those in power. In 2006 it was the congressional Republicans, followed by the Republican executive branch in 2008, and in 2010 the Democratic House. In so doing, they sent a message that they are dissatisfied with the way things are going and with the pace of change. They want an effective government that makes progress on things that matter in their lives, not squabbling politicians who seek to score political points. People want a stronger economy with more jobs, and they want a bright future for their children.

That is what the labor movement seeks as well. As Trumka put it, the election results are “a clarion call to the next Congress that job creation and fixing our economy must be the No. 1 priority.”

Looking forward, we expect members of Congress to focus on preserving and expanding the middle class, on investing in America and on accelerating job creation—not on obstruction, partisan investigations or the dismantling of programs or agencies that serve the public. And, let’s be clear, the administration needs to focus ever more sharply on jobs—on keeping those we have and protecting them against one-sided trade deals, and on helping create new ones. It should also more aggressively explain its accomplishments to the public—how it helped avert a second Great Depression, how its policies helped achieve just a month ago the biggest growth in jobs the country has seen in four years, how the domestic auto industry was not only rescued but has rebounded.

For our part, the NALC will continue to work as hard as possible in the interest



NALC activists with Michael Bennet, the senator from Colorado.

Nevada carriers turned out to support Sen. Harry Reid's re-election.



NALC national officers, headquarters staff and family members took part in a phone-bank at AFL-CIO Headquarters in Washington to help turn out the union vote.



Rep. Bill Keating won the Massachusetts 10th District seat with the help of NALC.

NALC member Liz Corriea was released to help Rep. Jerry McNerney (I). More about her work is below.



of our members, whether fighting for legislation or getting the message across to policymakers and the public. We are battling not only a new political landscape in Washington, but also the right-wing campaign against public employees and the push to privatize as many areas as possible to help corporations and hurt unions—even at the expense of American customers.

But what we have on our side at the NALC—a strong case based on reason and on financial responsibility, the best interests of the American people, and the support of the broader labor movement—is stronger than the obstacles we face.

Our goals are not partisan. We seek to continue providing the best service we can to our residential and business customers, and to assure the economic

viability of the United States Postal Service, one of the country's oldest, most important and most respected institutions. In an age of communications, the country must fortify, not weaken, the only national network that links 150 million households.

As a union, the NALC will continue to be ceaseless in fighting for the interests of our members, the USPS and the public.

As President Rolando noted, "In so doing, we know we will be able to count on your active support. Whether delivering the mail whatever the obstacles, collecting food to feed the hungry, supporting community-based or charitable activities, watching out for those we serve six days a week, or going to bat for our allies, letter carriers have never backed down. We do not plan to do so now." ✉

## Election night the end of one carrier's hard work

**L**iz Corriea, a letter carrier in Berkeley, CA, had never been involved full-time in a political campaign before.

But this year, she jumped right in to one of the toughest election seasons in years—and loved it.

The Greater East Bay Branch 1111 member spent almost three months working on the campaign of Rep. Jerry McNerney, D-CA, who was seeking his third term.

In the spring, Corriea went to the union's campaign school in Pasadena. After serving as a delegate at the NALC national convention in Anaheim in early August, she was released from her carrier duties to work on the election, which she did through Election Day, Nov. 2. Her duties included phone banking, precinct walks to union households, and helping organize rallies on weekends.

She found election work an interesting change from union activities, such as helping with grievances as a steward.

"My curiosity got me into trying something different," said Corriea, a 25-

year letter carrier. For the campaign, she commuted about 90 minutes each way, often seven days a week. She typically left at 7:30 a.m. to head toward Modesto or Stockton, and finished around 10 p.m.

The election was tight for much of the campaign, and eventually California State Association President John Beaumont added carriers to Corriea's campaign, doubling the allotment.

"We were told we were falling behind in the polls, so that was when our state president moved two people to us," she said. "It was great. There was a lot of work to do and so little time to do it. It helped us reach more people. You're doubling your calls, your precinct walks."

On election night, she was uncertain about what to expect.

"I was worried. I didn't know if we were going to win," Corriea said, in part because of what was going on in many places around the country. The results in her race were slow to come in, and reliable information was scarce.

"Then the state president called and told me we'd won. I was very surprised. I said, 'Wow! 'Yay!'"

And she'd do it again if asked. ✉



Corriea leads a precinct walk.