

Walker holds on in Wisconsin, Unionists vow to fight on



Photo by Dave Hoefler

Activists protest during an anti-Walker protest held at the state capitol in early June.

The results of the recall election that targeted Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker for defeat in June were a wake-up call for union members in the rest of America.

The recall effort failed—though Wisconsin voters did give pro-labor candidates a new majority in the state Senate—but labor leaders and analysts aren't crying about it. Instead, they are learning the lessons and preparing for the next battle.

"We can't expect to win every election, but we can succeed in the long run," NALC President Fredric V. Rolando said. "The history of labor is full of setbacks like this, but we responded by doubling our efforts."

The day after the election, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said, "We laid the groundwork for a powerful movement to push back against Walker-style anti-working family policies everywhere. The energy and momentum in Wisconsin have inspired working people from all walks of life to stand together in solidarity in unprecedented ways."

President Rolando pointed to lessons for letter carriers to ponder in the wake of the Wisconsin election.

"Wisconsin was just a battle in a larger struggle," he said. "The most important lesson is that we can only win when we have both the commitment and the resources." Rolando noted that just last fall, letter carriers and other union members in Ohio celebrated their overwhelming victory in a referendum that restored collective-bargaining rights for the state's 350,000 public workers by overturning a law championed by Republican Gov. John Kasich.

In the Ohio effort, unions leveraged their greatest advantage—volunteer work on the campaign by union workers. But they also raised enough money to get their message out to voters, keeping pace with anti-labor groups that poured money into Ohio.

Noting that Walker enjoyed a huge advantage in funding over his Democratic challenger, Rolando urged more letter carriers to support our own political war chest—COLCPE. "Only a small percentage of letter carriers give to COLCPE on a regular basis," he said. "Imagine what we could do if everyone pitched in."

The Wisconsin recall failure is sure to embolden the enemies of labor

nationwide, especially those targeting public-sector unions. GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney said after the Wisconsin vote that it was about stopping "runaway government costs imposed by labor bosses." Dozens of bills aimed at curbing union rights and workers' pay and benefits are pending in Congress and state legislatures. Lawmakers who are tempted to vote for measures opposed by the NALC, such as the draconian postal "reform" bill proposed by Rep. Darrell Issa (H.R. 2309) might feel that it is a safe vote because labor can't, or won't, respond.

Reasserting our clout will require a renewed effort in the elections this November. This will put pressure on COLCPE to support pro-labor candidates, including releases of letter carriers to work for campaigns. Letter carrier volunteers nationwide will be needed to back up those efforts—and, of course, to vote on Nov. 6.

"Don't give up hope—turn around and fight back," Rolando said. "The tides of politics shift quickly sometimes. We can win crucial elections this fall, but only if we work together." ✉