

Unity and solidarity in Philadelphia



**Fredric V.
Rolando**

The 69th Biennial Convention of the National Association of Letter Carriers may turn out to be the most memorable convention we've ever had. That's not just because we overcame a day-long power outage at the headquarters hotel during the weekend before the convention opened, or that we survived an early morning fire at the same hotel. It was an electrical fire that drove several hundred delegates and NALC officers and staff out onto the streets at around 4 in the morning on the third day of the convention, forcing many of the displaced to attend the convention in their pajamas!

And it won't be memorable just because we had to deal with a major labor dispute between the Pennsylvania Convention Center and the Carpenters union during the week of the convention—not a strike, not a lock-out, but something in between.

And it's not even because we celebrated our 125th anniversary all week, with a series of speeches and produced or discovered videos that revealed the NALC's rich history of service, solidarity and progress since 1889.

No, what made the Philadelphia convention so memorable was the unity and strength evident in the room all week. The state of our union is strong. The spirit and commitment of the delegates was extraordinary. Both the early morning and late afternoon workshops were packed to the gills. The debate in the general sessions over contractual, legislative and general resolutions was spirited and lively.

We were treated to amazing speeches from allies in Congress, including Sens. Elizabeth Warren (via video) and Bernie Sanders (in person), who are passionate about saving the Postal Service from dark political forces that want to dismantle our invaluable delivery, processing and retail networks. We received unflinching support and solidarity from the leaders of the American Postal Workers Union (again by video, since the APWU's convention in Chicago coincided with ours), the National Postal Mail Handlers Union, the American Federation of Government Employees as well as the No. 2 leader of the AFL-CIO, Secretary-Treasurer Liz Shuler.

Meanwhile, we dedicated significant segments of the convention to discussions about the future structure and oper-

ations of the NALC, the safety and health of letter carriers and the promise of postal banking to both serve the unmet financial service requirements of millions of American citizens and stabilize the finances of the Postal Service. And we demonstrated our solidarity with our brothers and sisters in the other postal unions by staging a very successful protest in support of the "Stop Staples" boycott (see Wednesday's coverage on page 35), while outlining plans for a fall campaign by the four-union postal alliance to thwart the postmaster general's disastrous plans to close an additional 82 processing plants in January 2015. The latter is just the latest in a string of actions by the PMG that threaten the survival of the Postal Service.

The energy and determination of the delegates to face the difficult challenges ahead left me energized and optimistic about the future. A successful convention, combined with a series of victories over the past six months against repeated attempts to eliminate Saturday delivery, have positioned us to go on the offensive for the next six months. We have forged a consensus among the four unions and the major business groups tied to the Postal Service on postal reform legislation. Our plan takes the best elements of the Carper-Coburn bill in the Senate, while dropping senseless service and job cuts in favor of smarter reforms that will strengthen the Postal Service to serve the evolving needs of 21st-century America.

We have come through an extraordinarily difficult period in our union's economic history—perhaps the most difficult since the Great Depression in the 1930s. And while we are far from out of the woods, it is clear that we have made a lot of progress since our last convention. We successfully battled to achieve our most important strategic goals in the most recent round of bargaining. We have defeated repeated attempts to dismantle the Postal Service and we have developed a viable, common-sense alternative reform proposal. We must now dedicate ourselves to building a Postal Service for the 21st century. That's the mission we adopted in Philadelphia.

As I told the delegates in Philly: "I am confident we will extend our 125-year streak of service, solidarity and progress for decades to come. Why am I confident? Because we have something that those who want to dismantle the Postal Service do not have. We have each other. Look around this hall and marvel at the nearly 8,000 union activists that have stepped up and reached out to represent tens of thousands of fellow letter carriers. Together, brothers and sisters, nobody can defeat us. Nobody can divide us; and nobody can get in our way."

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fredric V. Rolando".