

No rest for the weary after a difficult election



Fredric V. Rolando

If you are like me, the end of the 2016 election cycle comes as a great relief. Perhaps with the exception of the 1968 campaign that saw riots and the assassination of one of the major party candidates, the 2016 campaign has been the most unpleasant of my lifetime.

Frankly, the quality of our political debate—and of our entire electoral process—has been awful. No other advanced democracy on earth tolerates two-year presidential campaigns, awash in dark money (secret contributions from billionaires and corporations). Voters in other democratic societies don't let their politicians pick the voters instead of the other way around—through gerrymandered

congressional districts. And other advanced countries' media outlets do a much better job focusing on substance and holding politicians accountable to the truth. Sadly, we are all to blame.

As we await the final results on Nov. 8, we must do better. As citizens, we must end voter suppression efforts through vote-by-mail; we must demand more governing and less campaigning from our senators and representatives in Congress; we must demand real campaign finance reform that gives all Americans an equal say in our democracy; and we must demand a more civilized and amicable tone to our campaigns. It's up to us as American citizens to change and to demand change. It's on us, not just the politicians.

Our own members point the right way for our country. Thousands of letter carriers got involved in this year's campaigns by reading our candidate issues survey, by contributing small amounts to our Letter Carrier Political Fund, and by volunteering to turn out the vote for pro-letter carrier candidates from both parties. So as weary and discouraged by our politics as many of us may be, I remain inspired and hopeful that our activities as a union represent the best of our nation's democratic traditions.

We've focused on the workplace issues that matter to all of us, emphasized grassroots activism, and engaged in "small d" democratic activism. I want to thank each and every one of these members for their hard work and willingness to fight for their fellow letter carriers, active and retired alike, through the political process. We owe them a debt of gratitude for refusing to give in to apathy or pessimism. They are an inspiration to us all.

So it's over now, except for the counting. But for NALC, there

is no rest for the weary. We have two major challenges facing us before the new year begins.

Lame-duck Congress. A week after the election, the 114th Congress will return to Washington to take up issues that should have been taken care of earlier in its 2015-2016 session. Since it will include legislators who will be replaced early next year, either because of retirements or losses at the polls, it will be known as a "lame duck" Congress. They will not only have to figure out a way to fund the federal government beyond Dec. 9, when the current continuing resolution runs out, but also to decide whether to do the hard work necessary to reach an acceptable compromise on postal reform legislation.

NALC officers and staff continued to work through the fall with our labor and industry coalition partners to fix the shortcomings of a House postal reform bill that could finally resolve the pre-funding burden that has hamstrung the Postal Service over the past decade. Working with House and Senate leaders, we must protect door delivery for all U.S. businesses and households that now receive it, and we must ensure that Medicare integration is done in a way that is fair and reasonable to all retired postal employees. We will not support any final bill that does not achieve these goals.

At the same time, Congress may seek to break the years-long gridlock that has virtually depopulated the nine-member Board of Governors of the Postal Service and left three of five seats on the Postal Regulatory Commission technically vacant. These bodies make crucial decisions about our jobs and our futures. They are too important to ignore. We will not do that; we will fight for good appointments during the lame duck.

Negotiating a new contract. We continue to focus on collective bargaining for a new National Agreement with the Postal Service, even as we prepare for interest arbitration should it be necessary. We are making real progress and have been continuing productive conversations since we got back from our 70th biennial convention in Los Angeles. We are committed to remaining at the table as long as we have a realistic chance to reach a deal that is good enough to send to our active members for ratification. We are determined to narrow the gap between CCAs and career carriers, reward all carriers for their contributions to the Postal Service, preserve our COLA and sub-contracting protections, address the malignant culture on the workroom floor, and pursue several other top priorities set by our national convention.

No matter what happens with the election, the lame-duck session or the contract talks, we have hope for a better tomorrow, because we have each other and a strong union. There is no time to rest, brothers and sisters. Let's stay focused on the work ahead.