



Reports from the AFL-CIO convention delegates

October's AFL-CIO convention in St. Louis brought together more than 700 delegates and alternates from more than 200 affiliated unions, trade departments and state and area labor federations. The delegates meet every four years to elect officers, debate and adopt resolutions that guide the labor movement, learn from each other's successes and failures, and join together in solidarity.

Over the four days of this convention, delegates adopted more than 40 resolutions that demonstrated the AFL-CIO's dedication to fighting for better lives for working people, attended almost 20 workshops meant to teach union members valuable skills and information to take back to their locals, and participated in actions aimed at helping the local labor community around St. Louis. For more details on the convention, see the December issue of *The Postal Record*.

NALC was represented by six delegates from around the country, as well as President Fredric Rolando and Secretary-Treasurer Nicole Rhine, who are AFL-CIO delegates by virtue of their offices. The delegates, elected at NALC's 2016 convention in Los Angeles, have submitted reports on their thoughts, experiences and what they learned in St. Louis.

**Charlie Heege,
New York
Branch 36:**

I look forward to attending the



AFL-CIO convention every four years. I always leave the convention better than when I arrived, a stronger union member and leader. Experiencing the unity and strength from listening to the delegates share their successes and fights for workers' rights energizes me to strive to do even more.

This convention took place in St. Louis from Oct. 21 to Oct. 25 and was a well-choreographed convention. Resolutions were discussed with ample time for all delegates who wanted to get to a mic to speak. However, when votes were taken up on resolutions, there weren't any dissenting votes. There was no need for tellers at this convention.

We discussed and voted to adopt more than 40 resolutions and, of these adopted resolutions, 11 other resolutions were subsumed. Only three were referred to the AFL-CIO's executive council.

These adopted resolutions deal with every aspect of a worker's life, from a bill of rights for all workers to stand together to demand a good job with fair wages, to the freedom of joining together. Another adopted resolution calls for an independent political voice. Another resolves to make health care for all a reality.

My two favorite resolutions encouraged union members to run for local public offices and to support postal financial services and postal banking—a resolution introduced by Fred Rolando. Also, Nicole Rhine got up to a mic in support of allowing voters to vote by mail.

When we were not in session discussing resolutions, we attended workshops that dealt with many diverse topics. I attended a workshop that was titled, "Fighting Back Against Attacks on Workers' Rights." We discussed and listened to horror stories of how state legislatures are pushing "right to work" bills.

I am happy that I live in the progressive state of New York.

**Elise Foster,
Chicago
Branch 11:**



The portion of the convention that I felt was interesting and the most important was the resolutions. In order for us to "join, fight and win" together, we must make changes so everyone can be a part in the shared prosperity and no one is left behind. Challenges that our members face in the workplace, on issues such as hiring, social issues, discrimination, safety, racism, equal rights, civil rights, voting rights, pay issues, health care and women's rights—are key issues we face across this country within the labor movement. Moving forward, those issues are what we would like AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, Secretary-Treasurer Liz Schuler and Executive Vice President Tefere Gebre to focus on over the next four years.

We did not have much negative debate on these resolutions, but the vast majority spoke passionately about

the resolutions and how they affected them personally or their membership and why these resolutions should be adopted.

I also attended the meet-and-greet for J.B. Pritzler and Julianna Stratton, hosted by the Illinois AFL-CIO. These are endorsed candidates for governor and lieutenant governor of Illinois.

We had a great showing from the elected officials from Illinois who were in attendance to support the endorsed candidates. As an Illinoisan, I am well aware of the issues we face in our state with the current governor. His agenda is anti-union, anti-labor and anti-middle class, which is just wrong.

The house was packed with labor officials, delegates and members from unions across Illinois who all had the same interest—to get J.B. Pritzler elected. While the world is watching Illinois, we do know what is at stake.

Illinois borders states that are now “right to work” states and we are feeling more and more pressure from the other party, which is trying to turn Illinois in the wrong direction. We cannot let that happen. As leaders of our organizations, we must continue to educate, inform and encourage people about voting and the importance of getting the right candidates elected. We must put our personal likes and dislikes to the side and drive home why it is important to get our candidates elected. We also must work to register people to vote.

Overall, the convention was great and informative. I liked the paperless approach for distributing and considering resolutions—moving us toward the digital era with the tablet and the app.

Thanks to the NALC membership for the opportunity.

Anita Guzik, Los Angeles Branch 24:

The AFL-CIO convention was held in October in St. Louis and we were pleasantly surprised to receive a tablet and charger contained in a zipped folder, with outlets for recharging on every table. The tablet contained all the reports, schedules, agendas and workshop information so we did not have to carry paper—or kill trees. The theme of the convention was “Join/Fight/Win Together.”

Our nation’s public- and private-sector unions are acutely aware of the attacks on labor emanating from many different entities that are emboldened by the current White House and Congress. These union-busting organizations want to “put unions to death with a thousand cuts,” through outlawing payroll deduction and mandatory union membership, frequent re-certification and limiting the use of union dues. It is not that these groups necessarily want to take your jobs—they just want you to do the same work at significantly lower wages and without defined benefits.

At the convention we learned about the enemies of the labor movement. Here are just six of the organizations that deliberately make their goals sound oh-so-nice with the intent of enticing uninformed workers to attack from within:

Americans for Prosperity was founded in 2004 and is funded by the Koch brothers’ primary political advocacy group. It is one of the most influential American conservative organizations with more than 3 million



activists. They claim to be proponents of limited government and free markets and want a so-called pro-growth government, which we know as “trickle down.” More like trickle up.

The State Policy Network was founded in 1992 by a South Carolina businessman who was on The Heritage Foundation’s board of trustees. Vice President Mike Pence is a former president of this organization. Its “war on organized labor” includes introducing legislation to reduce or eliminate collective bargaining for government workers and to reduce the authority of unions to collect dues from government employees’ paychecks. They have even developed an anti-union toolkit aimed at curbing union influence.

The Center for Union Facts (CUF) is an advocacy group critical of labor unions. Its website purports to have studied union spending, then twists its findings to win over working people with such claims as “union member dues end up going toward political causes—like abortion activity—disguised as representational activity.” CUF has a website that further displays negative reports from the Office of Labor-Management Standards (broken down by union) for would-be anti-union antagonists to see and cite, including the full text of union audit reports, indictments and convictions since 2004.

The Heritage Foundation, one of the biggest propaganda mills, was founded in 1973. It lures would-be anti-union workers with arguments such as, “Would you want to work for a company that treats all workers exactly the same and promotes only based on seniority, not merit?” The main funding for the Heritage Foundation has come from the Koch Brothers (of

Below l: NALC Secretary-Treasurer Nicole Rhine introduces the NALC delegation.
Right: The hall for the 2017 convention in St. Louis.



The resulting public pressure led to a number of legislators and corporations withdrawing from this organization.

The Right to Work Committee was established in 1968. Its sole mission is to elimi-

nate union power and compulsory union membership through strategic litigation. Under “right-to-work” laws (now in effect in 28 states), employees in unionized workplaces may not be compelled to join a union, nor be compelled to pay for any part of the cost of union representation. Unions are fighting back with legislation to prevent the introduction of such laws. After a newly legislated right-to-work law passed in Missouri, union activists have gathered triple the signatures needed to put this issue on the ballot. The “Show Me” State rises to fight right-to-work laws. Good job, Missouri!

These anti-union groups can name themselves whatever they like, but the fact is that unions help working families and that’s good for America. We in NALC need to pull our weight by constructing and maintaining a formidable war chest.

Start by signing up or increasing your donations to our Letter Carrier Political Fund. When the union asks you to contact your House or Senate representative—do it. If you are on the overtime list and do not have time to call or visit—or if you are just

too shy—all your representatives have user-friendly websites where you can deliver your message by email. Or, you can put a stamp on it and use the U.S. Mail.

Denise Brooks, Medford, OR Branch 1433:

Resolution 40, “Rejecting the Privatization of Veteran’s Health Care,” was unanimously adopted by the AFL-CIO Convention delegates. Members of Congress have introduced legislation to privatize the Department of Veterans Affairs in whole or part, which would severely affect veterans’ abilities to obtain quick and affordable health care. The men and women who have served our country deserve better than to return to the civilian workforce with reduced health care options and low-wage jobs.

Veterans make up a large part of the federal and Postal Service workforce. Currently, 250,000 veterans enter the U.S. workforce each year. Almost 2 million of our working veterans earn less than \$15 per hour, and 800,000 earn less than \$10 per hour.

The AFL-CIO formed a Union Veterans Council whose mission is to speak for working-class veterans. This includes holding our elected officials accountable for the need to provide returning veterans with good jobs and a fully funded VA. The Veterans Council said it believes that “the ability for someone to self-identify as ‘pro-veteran’ isn’t determined by what lapel pin they don or what catchphrase they employ.”

Several years ago, NALC started our



course) and from Exxon/Mobil; both have given tens of millions to Heritage in exchange for pushing their destructive agendas. Their agenda includes sowing doubts about climate science, defunding Obamacare and pushing for programs that take money from public education and funnel it to corporations to pay for private schools for the rich. The Heritage Foundation created the “voter fraud” scam, which led to the voter ID movement with the intent of eliminating millions of minority and poor voters from voter pools.

The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) was founded in 1973. It is an organization of conservative state legislators and private-sector representatives who draft and share state-level legislation for distribution among state governments. ALEC has produced template bills on topics such as reducing regulation and corporate taxation, loosening environmental regulations, tightening voter identification rules and weakening labor unions. ALEC’s activities, while legal, received public scrutiny after being reported by publications, including *The New York Times*, as an organization that gave corporate interests outsized influence.



own Veterans Group that provides resources and legislative updates for our members. This is a great tool and also provides a link to the AFL-CIO's Veterans Council, further ensuring that our members can obtain valuable information concerning legislative attempts to reduce veterans' benefits.

Ingrid Armada, Providence, RI Branch 15:

As part of the NALC delegation to the AFL-CIO National Convention, I attended a workshop titled "Fighting Together for Immigrant Worker Rights" and sponsored by UNITE HERE, a union representing 270,000 people working in the hospitality industry and beyond.

The meeting presented an opportunity for activists from all unions to discuss diversity and inclusion. Many participants from California, Texas and Florida spoke from personal knowledge of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids at workplaces, homes or cars to verify their immigration status. They spoke about how all unions need to recognize that they will be involved, whether through their members or their family and friends, in the fight for immigrants' rights.

A spokesperson from the Labor Center for Immigrant Justice spoke about the center's mission to provide one-stop legal and wraparound services to immigrant union members through collaboration with local



unions. Unions have a role and need to rise together in solidarity and foster a movement to empower immigrants and all workers to achieve greater equality and opportunity.

Part of the program stressed the importance of educating our co-workers, friends and families about the current administration's and the Department of Homeland Security's threats to end temporary protective status (TPS) in the next year. That would eliminate work permits for more than 300,000 people, many of them union members.

Besides the TPS being threatened, Attorney General Jeff Sessions in September announced an end to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. DACA was established by President Obama in 2012 to offer temporary protection to undocumented immigrants who are brought to the U.S. as children. It applies to kids who are under the age of 16, have no legal status and meet other requirements. This end to DACA has been put on a temporary hold to give Congress a chance to pass legislation. In other words, while no new DACA applications are being accepted, the immediate end to DACA has been delayed temporarily.

Union activists were encouraged to let these people know they are not alone in their fight by participating in the political process and contacting their congressional representatives. We also need to help mobilize, organize and educate on protecting immigrants' rights, and to actively support the struggle to protect all immigrant workers and their families.

Lloyd Doucet, New Orleans Branch 124:



I attended the AFL-CIO Convention that was held in St. Louis Oct. 28 through Nov. 2. It was an inspiring one with the theme of "Join/Fight/Win Together."

There were many good workshops for us to attend. I was assigned to attend the one titled "Racism and anti-semitism post Charlottesville: We can no longer be silent."

There were a number of good speakers who spoke on how to address the situation and the need to speak on the subject. Afterward, they opened the floor to have open discussions on how to address the situations in our communities and what we can do to involve ourselves.

We discussed how the attacks have skyrocketed in Jewish, Latino and Muslim neighborhoods. We must fight against all kinds of racism and there must be solidarity. We should be in the forefront on the issues of equality, fair housing, criminal justice, creating jobs and promoting education.

It's extremely important that we build coalitions and dispense of any hatred. Only then can we have the uncomfortable conversations we need to have. As labor leaders, we and our members can be in the forefront of these issues in schools, churches and communities so that we can promote awareness.

We all must get involved to build that coalition and solidarity. **PR**