

The U.S. and NALC constitutions: Two documents that call us to action



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The U.S. Constitution and the *NALC Constitution* share conceptual commonalities, with both being deeply rooted in democratic principles. Probably the most obvious similarity that comes to mind is the tremendous sacrifice that was and continues to be made by those defending these ideals. The United States is steeped in a history of courageous men and women sacrificing in defense of our country, no matter the cost. This same commitment continues still and is arguably as strong as ever.

The labor movement shares a similar narrative. Throughout its history, American workers have fought hard to have their voices heard,

often risking not only their livelihoods but in some cases their freedom or their lives. The U.S. Constitution was drafted by our forefathers as a means to create and preserve our nation. In comparison, the *NALC Constitution* was drafted to identify and preserve the autonomous structure of our union. Another nuance that can't be overlooked is that the Postal Service as an institution is embedded in the U.S. Constitution.

The importance of debate

In both instances it is crucial that those affected, whether citizens, in the case of the nation, or NALC members, remain actively engaged in the process of debate when necessary on issues that affect them. Congress has the authority under the Constitution to create legislation in the form of bills that, once voted on and passed by our representatives, can be signed into law by the president. Once a bill is signed by the president, it becomes the law of the land.

Comparatively, within the *NALC Constitution*, branch and state associations are granted certain authority to establish bylaws by which to govern. Article 15 of the *NALC Constitution* directs the means and method by which branch or state association bylaws may be amended:

Each Branch or State Associations may make, alter, or rescind such by-laws, rules, and regulations from time to time as may be deemed most expedient, providing they do not in any way conflict with this Constitution. By-laws of branches may be amended at any regular meeting of the branch, provided the amendment has been submitted in writing at the last previous regular branch meeting, and suitable notification to members shall be made at least ten (10) days before

the regular meeting at which the vote is to be taken. By-laws and amendments thereto, fixing the amount of initiation fees, dues, and reinstatement fees, or the time and place of meetings, shall become effective at the time determined by the Branch or State Association. All other by-laws must be submitted in duplicate to the Chairperson of the Committee of Laws and shall not become effective until approved by the Committee of Laws as provided in Article 11, Sec. 3, of this Constitution.

Although branches often find themselves engaged in very lively debate over changes to branch bylaws, many of us overlook the external forces at play that can affect our careers, benefits and retirements.

Make your voices heard

Miscalculated changes legislated by our congressional representatives on Capitol Hill can have a devastating impact on our future and the survival of the Postal Service. One should never forget that the politicians whom we send to the White House and Capitol Hill are sent there to represent our interests. We must never squander that which has been so hard fought for. We all have a right as well as an obligation to one another to demand that those elected to represent our interests do just that. But for our demands to be met, our voices must be heard. It is inadequate to simply hope that our elected officials somehow stumble upon the right conclusion and do the right thing. We as citizens, guardians and defenders of the Constitution must remain ever vigilant and educated, always ready and willing to make our voices heard on issues affecting our careers as letter carriers and on those benefits our predecessors fought so hard to achieve, and that we collectively strive so diligently to maintain and improve upon.

The United States is a democratic republic and you should never forget that you do have a voice and a vote. There is no better time than now to educate your congressional representatives about those issues affecting letter carriers and the Postal Service. We can no longer afford to sit idly by hoping that others do the heavy lifting for us. Our call to action is now and we owe it to each other to answer that call as those who came before us have done.

On this Memorial Day, Monday, May 27, honor the memory of those men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice by reflecting on the rights and freedoms they fought and died for on behalf of us all.