



Elections 2020

What the results mean for letter carriers

With the 2020 elections behind us, the new landscape for letter carriers in Washington will continue to be challenging when the 117th Congress is sworn in on Jan. 3, and when the next president is inaugurated on Jan. 20.

In the meantime, the current administration and Congress are wrapping up a lame-duck session during a global pandemic that is once again spiking. Even without the added pressure of COVID-19, gridlock and partisanship have defined the Republican-controlled Senate and Democratic-controlled House of Representatives for years. This gridlock has been exacerbated by an unconventional and often unpredictable White House.

In the fallout from all of this, the country faces major challenges on two fronts: improving the economy and improving the response to COVID-19. Those continuing challenges have affected our ability to advance meaningful legislation and reforms specific to strengthening the Postal Service. It is unlikely that a change in the White House and shifts in the House and Senate will improve our landscape overnight.

Making sense of the results

At press time, President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris had surpassed the necessary 270 Electoral College votes to win the election. The results will be certified when the Electoral College meets to certify the results on Dec. 14. In the meantime, the president has continued to exhaust legal options in several states questioning the legitimacy of the election. These actions are unlikely to change the outcome of



President-elect Joe Biden

the election, according to most election observers, meaning that on Jan. 20, the Biden-Harris administration will take over.

In the interim, the current period of transition has been rocky, delaying the incoming Biden administration from using proper transition resources from the current administration. The result could delay the Biden administration's ability to take decisive actions starting on Day One.

What we do know about the incoming administration and letter carriers is that Biden has pledged to protect and promote the Postal Service. As the 2020 Democratic Party platform states:

The U.S. Postal Service (USPS) is the world's most efficient mail carrier, and Democrats are wholly committed to supporting a public USPS. We will fight all efforts to

privatize the USPS and will work to ensure the USPS is financially sustainable, including by repealing the mandate that the agency "pre-fund" retiree health costs. Democrats will protect the Postal Service's universal service obligation as a core American value and maintain six-day and doorstep delivery mail delivery, which is a lifeline for rural Americans. We will also support new revenue streams for the USPS, including allowing secure shipping of alcoholic beverages by mail and exploring options to enable unbanked and underbanked Americans to access financial services through the Postal Service.

In addition, Biden has repeatedly expressed his support for unions and worker protections, including this statement: "Strong unions built the great American middle class. Every-

thing that defines what it means to live a good life and know you can take care of your family—the 40-hour work week, paid leave, health care protections, a voice in your workplace—is because of workers who organized unions and fought for worker protections. As president, I’ll encourage union organizing and collective bargaining. And I’ll make sure every American has a fair shot at the American Dream, regardless of race, gender, income, or ZIP code. I believe in our founders’ ideals: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal....’ We’ve never fully lived up to them, but we’ve never quit trying. And I’m not about to let us quit trying now.”

So far, the election has brought little structural change to Congress.

Democrats will continue to control the House, though their margin over the GOP narrowed, meaning that letter carriers will need to continue engaging representatives on both sides of the aisle, building relationships with new members and getting reacquainted with some returning members. As this publication was going to print, several races had yet to be called or were beginning a recount.

In the Senate, the current makeup is not yet finalized. Currently, the makeup stands at 48 Democrats and 50 Republicans. Democrats were able to flip two seats that were held by Republicans: Mark Kelly will replace Sen. Martha McSally in Arizona, and John Hickenlooper will replace Sen. Cory Gardner in Colorado. Republicans captured a seat in Alabama, where Tommy Tuberville defeated Sen. Doug Jones.

As this magazine was going to

print, two Senate elections remained up in the air in Georgia that will determine the balance of power in the Senate. Sen. Kelly Loeffler (R), who was appointed to her seat in 2019 by the governor, will face a runoff with the Rev. Raphael Warnock (D). The second contest is between Sen. David Perdue (R) and Jon Ossoff (D). In Georgia, a candidate must receive 50 percent of the vote to avoid a runoff. In both races, neither winner reached that threshold, so Georgia voters will decide the course of the Senate in the Jan. 5 runoffs.

Because the GOP has a 50-48 edge in the Senate, to maintain control of the chamber, Republicans need to win just one of those races; winning both would give them 52 seats. If the Democrats win both seats, the split of the Senate would be 50-50 with Vice President-elect Harris being the deciding vote. Georgia was one of the last states that some media outlets called in the presidential election for Biden; this was the first time in 28 years that Georgia had gone for the Democratic nominee.

Whatever the eventual balance of power is in the Senate, Homeland Security and Government Affairs Chairman Ron Johnson (R-WI), who has refused to address postal issues, will step aside from that role on the committee. Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH) will be the leading Republican on the committee, and Ranking Member Gary Peters (D-MI), who was just re-elected in Michigan, will remain the committee’s top Democrat.

No matter what happens on Jan. 5 in Georgia, NALC will continue to work with senators on both sides of the aisle to achieve what we need—but broader challenges exist that

must be addressed before we can move forward.

Healing divisions

In the popular vote, 73 million Americans voted for President Donald Trump, while 79 million voted for former Vice President Biden. Without question, this is a large vote margin for Biden, but more telling is that 73 million Americans voted for Trump—raising the question of what needs to be done to unify the country. As things now stand, the fires of division are so pronounced that the holidays might be uncomfortable around the virtual dinner table.

“Unity is our greatest strength as a country and as a union,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said. “Our first challenge will be to heal the division, anger and hostility that exist, as part of our effort to find a place of balance and progress for letter carriers and their families. For many within our union, it’s been an overwhelming time. Many of our members are celebrating the election results and many are not. That recognition is central to moving forward in unity to best serve our members.”

As essential workers, letter carriers have been at the center of public service during the pandemic, bringing Americans supplies so that they can shelter at home, and providing nearly 70 million Americans the ability to vote safely by mail. Those successful missions are worth celebrating.

As we prepare for the next Congress and administration, we will remain focused on our unifying goals—relief, repeal and the opportunity to pursue policies that would advance the Postal Service and protect letter carriers’ jobs, benefits and future. **PR**



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Letter carriers delivered democracy

In a year of extraordinary circumstances, letter carriers did an extraordinary job. Called upon to safeguard elections and keep Americans safe while looking out for their own health during a pandemic, letter carriers delivered tens of millions of ballots to voters, and completed ballots from voters to election officials.

NALC has long advocated for expanding the ability of Americans to vote by mail, but we didn't expect it to happen so quickly and dramatically. With a pandemic raging in an election year, most states turned to the mail to give voters safe access to ballot boxes by broadening access to voting by mail.

A large number of Americans embraced the vote-by-mail option: Postmaster General Louis DeJoy said at the USPS Board of Governors meeting on Nov. 13 that the Postal Service had delivered a total of 135 million ballots, counting both blank ballots mailed to voters and completed ones mailed to election officials.

Some voters waited until Election Day to cast their votes in person; some sent ballots by mail, and some received ballots by mail and then cast them by hand before Nov. 3 (Election Day), either at early voting polling places or at lockboxes set up by election officials.

Controversies and court battles swirled around the Postal Service for months. Yet, throughout USPS's political struggles, added scrutiny, unfair criticism from politicians, a surge in package delivery and personal health challenges posed by the COVID-19 virus, letter carriers demonstrated once again why they are essential workers playing the lead role in the mission of the most trusted federal agency.

"In this unprecedented election year, letter carriers did their jobs and did them well," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "When difficulties of all stripes were thrown at them, they pressed on as they always do and safeguarded our democracy while protecting the safety of the public."

Background drama

The rapid shift to relying on the mail to deliver ballots came with controversies and court battles that began months before Election Day and persisted even after Nov. 3.

Soon after the COVID-19 virus began spreading in March, many states expanded access to voting by mail. President Trump's attacks on voting by mail began soon after—he claimed that mass voting by mail would be subject to fraud, while others saw in his attacks a fear that making voting easier would harm his re-election chances.

When DeJoy was named postmaster general in June, his changes to postal operations brought charges that he was trying to disrupt the vote-by-mail process to Trump's advantage. The changes included DeJoy's order to curtail use of some overtime to get mail out in a timely manner. A flurry of congressional hearings and lawsuits followed, and DeJoy said he would back off on most of the changes until after the election. He also agreed, at NALC's behest, to set up a task force with the four postal unions that met regularly to resolve any problems that arose regarding the postal role in the election.

Anticipating a surge in ballot deliveries as the election neared, campaigns battled in court over when ballots had to be received to be counted, which added to the tension in several

key states. Election laws in 28 states require mailed ballots to reach election officials by the end of Election Day to be counted; the other 22 states allow for counting them after Election Day, up to a certain number of days, if they are postmarked by Election Day.

In the weeks before the election, courts ruled on disputes over these deadlines state by state. In September, a federal judge in the Southern District of New York ruled that USPS could not cut funding for overtime leading up to the elections and required it to ship ballots as First Class after Oct. 15. Several courts in other parts of the country issued similar orders. Some lawsuits reached the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled that ballots in Pennsylvania and North Carolina must be counted even if they were postmarked by Election Day and arrived within a certain time period; however, the court rejected a similar policy in Wisconsin because it was ordered by a federal judge, not a state election board or a state court with jurisdiction.

These were only a few of the conflicts over the details of mail ballots that occupied state legislatures, election boards and courtrooms all summer and fall. During the campaign, President Trump raised the specter of a legal challenge to ballots received by mail after Nov. 3.

As the election approached and following past practice, USPS adopted extraordinary measures across the country, including extended post office and delivery hours, Sunday collections, and the local sortation of ballots destined for local addresses for immediate delivery rather than sending them to regional processing plants.

Nevertheless, often-inaccurate reports of slow mail processing prompt-



ed federal judges to issue several orders to USPS to speed up delivery right up to Election Day.

A week before the big day, Judge Emmet G. Sullivan of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia issued perhaps the most demanding ruling of any court on the matter. He ordered postal leadership to tell any employee who had previously been informed of Postmaster General DeJoy's push to dramatically scale back late and extra trips that the directive was no longer valid, and ordered postal employees to perform those trips "to the maximum extent necessary to increase on-time mail deliveries, particularly for election mail." The ruling came in a lawsuit against USPS involving a coalition of voting rights groups.

The judge ordered USPS to tell employees specifically that "late and extra trips should be performed to the same or greater degree than they were performed prior to July 2020 when doing so would increase on-time mail deliveries" and that "any prior communication that is inconsistent with this instruction should be disregarded." Judge Sullivan also made clear that ballots must be delivered regardless

of postage, even if they had no stamp at all.

Sullivan issued another order requiring USPS to use its Express Mail network to speed ballot delivery and to handle ballots headed to the same city that they are mailed from to be processed the same day they arrive or at least the next morning.

Virtually all of the actions the judge ordered were adopted by the National Election Task Force weeks earlier and were in place already, but the extra judicial attention added to the pressure on the Postal Service.

The nation woke up on Nov. 4 to see the presidential results unclear, with several states still too close to call—in many cases due to outdated election laws that required waiting to count mail ballots until after the polls had closed. On Nov. 7, after poll workers counted all of the ballots, it became apparent that Biden had won, though Trump refused to concede—claiming that voting irregularities had cost him the election—and launched court battles to challenge the results in several states. Regardless of the complications and the challenges from delivering in a pandemic, letter carriers passed their

test of national voting by mail with flying colors, facilitating a record number of votes by mail.

Carriers worked hard to get the job done.

"Letter carriers across upstate New York and Ohio reported working very late days leading up to the election," Region 11 National Business Agent Mark Camilli reported. "Typically, carriers who would normally leave the office around 9 a.m. were working in the office until 1 to 2 p.m. due to several sets of political mail. Many ended their day at 9:30 to 10 p.m. or later to make sure that that day's mail was delivered." The election workload came on top of the ongoing surge in parcels brought by the pandemic.

"Region 11 also had a few locations case and carry mail on the Sunday prior to the election," Camilli added. "We got it done and we are all proud of the essential service letter carriers were able to provide."

Rolando praised letter carriers for a job well done.

"In every part of the nation," Rolando said, "letter carriers demonstrated their dedication to making the mail work for democracy." **PR**



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Released carriers made the pitch

As in previous elections, NALC deployed its political network to help pro-letter carrier, pro-labor candidates by contacting members of NALC and other unions on their behalf. The efforts were led by NALC state associations and NALC's network of legislative and political organizers (LPOs).

LPOs support the state associations by developing and implementing plans specifically designed for the challenges within each state to build their capacity to participate in campaigns. LPOs train other letter carriers, officers and rank-and-file activists to help carry out the plans and recruit new activists. The hard work of LPOs and state associations to prepare for the election season gave letter carriers a voice in the campaigns.

The five LPOs are:

- **Marc Ashmon** of Linden, NJ Branch 2876, who covers Regions 11, 12, 14 and 15.
- **John Beaumont** of San Francisco, CA Branch 214, who covers Regions 1 and 2, and the states of Arizona, Colorado and Wyoming from Region 4.
- **Brent Fjerestad** of Sioux Falls, SD Branch 491, who covers Regions 5, 7 and 10.
- **Eileen Ford** of Roswell, GA Branch 4862, who covers Regions 9 and 13.
- **Anna Mudd** of Louisville, KY Branch 14, who covers Regions 3, 6 and 8, and the states of Arkansas and Oklahoma from Region 4.

"We've strengthened our union's legislative and political network, and it took off this year," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "The ground-work our LPOs and state association presidents have laid made a big differ-

ence, and it will boost NALC's voice in Washington, DC, on behalf of letter carriers."

LPOs paved the way for the campaign work many months in advance.

To prepare for the outreach efforts to union voters in Minnesota and Wisconsin, the two states Fjerestad focused on this year, he recruited ground-level letter carrier activists to work with the AFL-CIO campaigns by contacting fellow union members to give them information and urge them to vote for the endorsed candidates. The activists, all retired letter carriers, volunteered in this election as released carriers.

Fjerestad recruited retired carriers with the relevant computer skills for the task, set them up with the campaigns in each state, and helped them work through any problems.

"I tried to reach out to them every other day," Fjerestad said. "They did a fabulous job."

Ford organized the efforts of 23 volunteer retired carriers in Florida and North Carolina to work with the AFL-CIO in each state, and she praised their dedication. "They did an outstanding job," she said. "Their care for the Postal Service and letter carriers was very apparent."

As in most states, the volunteer carriers largely focused on phone calls to union voters rather than door-to-door canvassing, given COVID-19 concerns. "They worked a long career," Ford said, "and we didn't want them to jeopardize their retirement by getting sick."

Though the two states ultimately had disappointing results, she added, Ford said the letter carriers "got the message out" in a powerful manner.

State by state, those letter carrier activists at ground level helped to make

the plans developed by the state associations and LPOs a reality. Though in past campaigns some released letter carrier volunteers had gone door to door to drop campaign literature or had talked directly to voters, most of the volunteers had to switch tactics this year because of concerns about COVID-19 transmission.

"Primarily, we did phone calling" to voters in Michigan, said **Patty Linna**, a Western Wayne County, MI Branch 2184 member. "We just got on the phone banks and called daily. We did 100, 200, 300 calls a day" per person, she said.

Linna estimates that only about 10 percent of the calls were answered each day, but volunteers tried them again the next day. Later, the campaign added texting capability, so she was able to contact voters by text message as well. "That was really useful for younger people who don't answer the phone," she said.

She participated, with precautions to avoid the spread of the virus, in literature distribution on Election Day to urge voters to the polls. Linna also served as an observer as votes were tallied in Detroit.

Michigan, which candidate Trump won in 2016, voted for former Vice President Joe Biden this time, and U.S. Sen. Gary Peters (D), who was endorsed by the AFL-CIO, survived a challenge to retain his seat. "It seems that the work paid off," Linna said.

Wisconsin was another battleground state that chose Biden this year, with the help of volunteer carrier **Scott Van Derven**, after Trump had managed a victory there in 2016.

With a pandemic raging, Van Derven, a member of Milwaukee Branch 2 and former state association president

whose term ended in October, was confined to phone calls and texts to reach union members.

“Normally, I’d be on the doors,” he said. “That’s what letter carriers are good at.” He made a few hundred phone calls a day to union members across the state.

He noticed some trends that differed from 2016, when he also had worked to contact union members about AFL-CIO-endorsed candidates. This year, he said, “most people had pretty much made up their minds” about whom to vote for, and fewer were interested in third-party candidates.

“I had some really good conversations with people,” he added. When he happened upon a voter who strongly supported the endorsed candidates, Van Derven said, “that kind of gave you a little energy” that made the job easier.

Van Derven also used text messaging, which he soon learned was an effective tool for reaching younger voters. “In the younger demographic, it’s more what people respond to,” he said. “There was an interaction.”

With Biden winning the state by only 20,500 votes—about 0.6 percent, approximately the same margin Trump won by in 2016—the Trump campaign requested a partial recount after Wisconsin finalized its vote count. But because the margin of Biden’s victory



Due to COVID-19 restrictions, letter carriers and other activists participated in virtual phone banks.

stands at more than 0.25 percent, the Trump campaign was required to pay for the recount, unless the current margin narrows.

Pennsylvania State Association President and Mon-Yough Branch 332 member **Paul Rozzi** again volunteered as a released carrier in his state and noticed immediately the differences brought by the pandemic. “It was different this time because of COVID-19,” he said. The local AFL-CIO office is “usually a hive of activity, but there was none of that this time.”

Instead, “we used everything in our bag of options to try to get the message out,” he said, including phone calls, texts and some literature drops.

For the literature drops, he said, “we didn’t knock on doors or push conversations,” due to COVID-19. “We wore masks, and if we happened to see people outside, we stood well outside

the 6 feet to initiate conversations.”

After several days of ballot-counting in Pennsylvania, state officials announced the tally Nov. 7, showing Biden in the lead. That appeared to put Biden over the 270 electoral votes required to win the presidency. At press time, the Trump campaign was preparing a legal challenge to the state’s voting results.

“The LPOs and the releases did an outstanding job,” NALC Executive Assistant to the President Eddie Davidson said. “They worked day and night for seven weeks to get out the vote and have letter carriers’ voices heard.”

NALC’s political activism is paid for from the Letter Carrier Political Fund, a political action fund to which letter carriers make voluntary contributions. By law, no contributions to political campaigns are made from union dues. **PR**