

# 'Hope dies last' in an otherwise horrible year



**Fredric V. Rolando**

**L**et's face it: 2020 has been a terrible year. A deadly pandemic has cost the lives of more than a quarter million Americans and has totally disrupted our lives. Tens of millions of jobs have been lost. Many of our schools are closed to in-person instruction. We can't go to the movies or attend sporting events in large numbers. Thousands of small businesses have been destroyed. Many of us will not be able to spend time with our loved ones during the holiday season as COVID-19 infection rates, hospitalizations and deaths reach new peaks—making travel and family occasions extremely risky. In short, the pandemic

and its impact have been awful, and none of us will look back fondly on these events.

**And yet, 2020 is ending on a decidedly hopeful note. Let me give you three examples.**

First, despite all the naysaying, American democracy is alive and well—due in no small part to the efforts of America's postal employees. Thanks to vote-by-mail, which provided tens of millions of Americans a safe way to vote in the middle of a pandemic, we just had the best turnout in a U.S. election in more than a century. When all the votes are counted, more than 160 million Americans will have cast their ballots—which means that two-thirds of all eligible voters participated, a huge increase. The Postal Service and its employees rose to the occasion by safely and securely handling between 60 million and 70 million ballots this election season. The labor-management collaboration exhibited by the National Election Task Force worked superbly, despite the challenges of conducting postal operations in a pandemic. We took extraordinary measures to make sure that every possible ballot was counted. We delivered for America, and the scenes of crowds all over the United States cheering on letter carriers and other postal employees after the election makes us justly proud of our role in American democracy.

Second, Americans elected true friends of letter carriers and the Postal Service to serve in the White House. I know that some of our members supported President Trump, but his unfounded attacks on the Postal Service and its employees posed an existential threat to our jobs and futures. The defeat of that threat leaves me hopeful for the future.

NALC congratulates President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris and pledges to work with the new administration to bring our country together.

Third, just after the election, we reached a tentative agreement on a new national contract, an extremely positive development. (See story on page 4.) As I have repeatedly reported over the past several months, NALC followed a dual-track approach to achieve a new National Agreement with ongoing negotiations and the presentation of the best-possible case for our proposals in interest arbitration. I am proud of the case and the evidence we amassed in the interest arbitration proceeding, but I am even more pleased that letter carriers will now get to decide whether or not to accept this tentative agreement in a ratification vote, following the procedure outlined in the *NALC Constitution*. I'd like to thank all the officers and staff who worked so hard to reach this proposed National Agreement.

Despite these hopeful signs, we face a lot of uncertainty going into 2021. In early January, there will be two runoff elections in Georgia that will decide control of the U.S. Senate. The stakes for the Postal Service and its employees are enormous. The current leaders of the Senate have been totally hostile to the Postal Service and its employees. They have opposed financial relief to help the USPS get through the decline in letter mail revenue resulting from the pandemic-related economic shutdown, as well as hazard pay for front-line workers, such as letter carriers. The House of Representatives has repeatedly enacted relief bills that would strengthen the Postal Service. Changing the leadership of the Senate would go a long way toward making that relief possible.

**"Hope dies last" is an old expression in the labor movement—it's an affirmation that, without hope, success is not possible.** Let us remember that in the difficult months to come for our country. President-elect Biden embodies that hope. He has called on all of us to set aside our political differences and to strive to work together to overcome the pandemic and the economic crisis we face.

Let that be true within our union as well. I know that there are political divisions among NALC members—I've received very moving letters from members who share that they are made to feel like outcasts for supporting President Trump. And I've heard from other members who worry that President Trump and his supporters have turned their backs on democracy itself. We don't have to sacrifice our political principles to belong to the NALC; we just need to remember that our common interests and values as union members are bigger than the issues that divide us. That would be true no matter who won the election. Hope dies last, brothers and sisters.

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