

## Restoring faith in our democracy



**Fredric V. Rolando**

In this issue of *The Postal Record*, we honor the members of NALC who contribute to the Letter Carrier Political Fund (LCPF), our political action committee (see story on page 14.) NALC uses the fund to support candidates in both parties to build bipartisan support in Washington for pro-letter carrier policies and programs. It thereby facilitates a deeper participation in our nation's nearly 250-year-old democracy. I am profoundly grateful to every member who contributes to the LCPF. Your voluntary contributions have allowed us to defend our collective-bargaining rights, to preserve our health and retirement benefits, and to protect affordable universal

service through the U.S. Postal Service.

Normally, this annual rite of appreciation is also a chance to celebrate our country's democracy, our birthright as Americans. Sadly, as we go to press, much of the country is bitterly divided and fearful about the future of our democracy. A recent poll by National Public Radio found that 64 percent of Americans believe "our democracy is in crisis and at risk of failing." Some 60 percent of Americans polled by Pew Research said they are "dissatisfied with how democracy is working in the U.S." A survey by CBS found that a shocking 36 percent of Americans believe political violence "is sometimes justified," up from just 13 percent in 1995. These polls, taken one year after the attack on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, reveal a deep pessimism and bitter partisan division in our country.

**At the center of this division is a fundamental difference of opinion about the way we conduct elections.** Half of our country believes that voting should be made easier, while the other half focuses on new restrictions they say are necessary to prevent voter fraud. Given NALC's and the labor movement's strong support for civil rights and universal vote-by-mail (with appropriate measures to ensure election integrity), there is no secret as to which side NALC has taken in this debate. But no matter where individual members come down on this issue, I think we can all agree that we cannot ignore this crisis of confidence in our democracy. We must restore a broadly held faith in our system of government and our system of voting. Americans must be able to accept the results of elections; we must see each other as fellow citizens and not enemies, no matter the results of any specific election.

That is a lot easier said than done. In this moment of extreme polarization, Democratic and Republican state governments are pulling in opposite directions. Some states are making it easier to register and to vote by expanding absentee voting, poll hours and days of early voting, while others are doing the exact opposite. In reaction, Congress has spent the last year developing legislation to establish uniform standards for federal elections, as provided by the "elections clause" of the U.S. Constitution (Article I, Section 4), which states: "The Times, Places and Manner of holding Elections for Senators and Representatives, shall be prescribed in each State by the Legislature thereof; but the Congress may at any time by Law make or alter such Regulations, except as to the Places of choosing Senators." (Emphasis added.)

Though a decentralized system of election administration makes some sense for election security, having no minimum standards for the rules for voting also feeds partisan in-fighting. In fact, in the runup to the 2020 election, many state governments sued each other over changes in election procedures in response to the pandemic—and many members of Congress joined those suits. That's crazy and dysfunctional.

We need to establish a level playing field for registering as well as for casting and counting votes that will bolster confidence in our electoral system and promote bipartisan support for democracy. In mid-January, as this issue went to press, the House of Representatives tried to do just that. It passed the Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act, which draws elements from two other bills: the Freedom to Vote Act drafted by moderate Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV), which establishes minimum uniform standards for the conduct of elections and the drawing of congressional districts; and the John R. Lewis Act, a bill to strengthen the Voting Rights Act (VRA), a civil rights measure that has been repeatedly reauthorized since 1965 under both Republican and Democratic presidents. (In 2006, the VRA was reauthorized for 25 years by a vote of 98-0 in the Senate and signed by President George W. Bush.) In a properly functioning democracy, the Senate would debate this bill, propose and adopt amendments, and seek a bipartisan consensus. Regrettably, that is not likely to happen with today's hyperpolarization, particularly with a closely divided Senate and the routine abuse of the Senate's filibuster rules (see this space in the August 2021 issue).

**As a union, NALC strives to be a unifying force for our members** in our bipartisan approach to politics. We focus on the issues that unite us and work with both parties to advance our members' interests while promoting the common good. The members who make voluntary contributions give us the tools to do this important work. We are so grateful for their solidarity. Let's thank them by working together to overcome the partisan divisions facing our country. We are all in this together.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fredric V. Rolando". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a white background.