

# Yes, it's better in a union!



**Brian L.  
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**I**'ve heard this question posed repeatedly lately: "Is it really better in a union?" It absolutely is!

As the son of a letter carrier growing up in Hattiesburg, MS, I didn't know any other way. Even in Mississippi, which isn't known for its union density, I was aware of how the union affected my family. From a young age, I heard stories about letter carriers and understood what the union had done for my dad's job. These stories have stayed with me and given me a sense of purpose, as I'm sure similar stories have for many of our members.

**NALC was formed in 1889**, and it soon fought and eventually won a Supreme Court case in 1893 that forced the Postal Service to adhere to an eight-hour workday. Prior to that case, carriers worked 10- to 16-hour days, six days a week. Independent state associations flocked to join NALC following this tremendous victory that set the stage for nationwide implementation of the eight-hour workday and overtime pay for workers in general.

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Every day, I marvel at the solidarity displayed in our union. As I travel the country to speak to our members about the challenges we face and how we must navigate

each one, I am humbled by the compassion, support and encouragement expressed by our members. As we continue negotiations on a new collective-bargaining agreement that I feel confident will reward our members, I feel my brothers and sisters rallying behind our efforts. Regardless of any noise or vitriol from anyone seeking to fracture our union, the strength, perseverance and spirit of solidarity of our membership continues to shine.

Nearly 95 percent of letter carriers voluntarily join our great union. This is an anomaly in the labor movement that most unions can only dream of replicating. Sixty national unions, representing more than 12.5 million workers in the public and private sectors, are affiliated with the AFL-CIO. Our union brothers and sisters do not have this level of success in organizing.

Organizing is just one of the strengths of our union that allows us to directly contribute to the overall advancement of the U.S. labor movement. When I took office last December, I became the youngest president in the labor movement and among the youngest ever from the South, which is fertile ground for labor. This was my motivating factor in joining the AFL-CIO's Committee on Organizing. Labor learns from one another, and we show up for one another for the good and the bad. We certainly have a lot to share with our brothers and sisters, which is why one of our priorities is paying our success forward, but we also have a lot to learn.

Last month, the AFL-CIO held its first "Labor State of the Union" event, where AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler spoke passionately about the rise in union favorability and the power that's been on display recently. Public support for unions has never been higher. This is especially true for those under 30, who are the future of the labor movement. On the heels of this event, NALC was proud to join thousands of other union members to descend on Washington to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the March on Washington. For such a significant event, without the presence of labor that day, turnout would have been underwhelming. Labor always rises to the occasion to fill the gaps and to be the driving force for change. This feels especially true right now.

This summer, as NALC members have been holding rallies to bring attention to the surge in robberies and assaults against our members, we have seen other union members joining us. Meanwhile, our members are joining picket lines around the country. And we aren't alone. As this publication was going to print, affiliates of the AFL-CIO were on the offensive in boosting support for our

brothers and sisters at the United Auto Workers (UAW), who have begun a strike against Detroit automakers. Striking workers from the Writers Guild of America (WGA) have been publicly supported by the members of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG-AFTRA), who also are on strike and in many cases are refusing to tow the “business as usual” appearances. Striking UNITE-HERE hotel workers in California felt solidarity when professional athletes, now part of the AFL-CIO Sports Council, stepped in to refuse the use of a specific hotel. Starbucks workers are organizing. Collaboration and solidarity have never been more palpable. The labor movement is flexing its strength. Even though our union is busy and focused, we will and we must make time to ensure all of our brothers and sisters are successful. A win for any worker is a win for all of us.

**As I travel and meet with our members, two questions inevitably come up: “How is collective bargaining going?” and “How are you doing?”**

Collective bargaining is going well. During negotiations, there always is eagerness and anticipation among our members. It’s natural. I felt it as a rank-and-file member, a branch and state leader, a Headquarters staffer, an officer serving as chief spokesperson in two rounds of negotiations, and now as president. A lot of work has been done on countless issues, and I continue to engage constantly with our counterparts at the Postal Service.

Our goal as we entered contract negotiations was to secure an agreement that recognizes the immense changes since our last contract and that rewards carriers now and in the future. I am grateful for our members who make their voices heard. I hear your concerns and can promise you all that we are committed to doing our best for you and will present a contract to our members for ratification only if it meets our goals and appropriately rewards letter carriers.

I sometimes hear members tell other members to be patient with collective bargaining. I don’t tell members that because I am not patient with it. That said, it is a simple fact that historically, the process takes time. We have the largest bargaining unit in the country under a single collective-bargaining agreement. There is a lot at stake for the future both of NALC members and the Postal Service.

While I remain confident in our chances of reaching a negotiated agreement with USPS, we are prepared to go forward in the interest arbitration process if that is what it takes to achieve an agreement that meets our needs.

As of the time of writing this message in mid-September, we have several key issues where we have yet to reach agreement. We have made progress on those issues in recent weeks. Even as we move forward with scheduling interest arbitration proceedings, we will continue to negotiate with our counterparts as long as there is opportunity to reach an agreement. Regardless of which way we ultimately reach a new contract, I am confident it will be one that rewards our members and makes significant progress in key areas.

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On the second question, I am healthy and well. I feel great. I am energized by the outpouring of support from our members. Everywhere I go, our members share inspirational stories with me about their experiences overcoming adversity of all kinds. In many ways, they remind me of much of our union’s history of achievement in the face of difficult circumstances.

Support for one another is a clear demonstration of the solidarity that is a foundational element of our union’s success. It is what paves the way for us to win, as we have for 134 years, and will continue to do for years to come by empowering ourselves by standing together.

