

## Embracing unity



**Mack I.  
Julion**

**U**nity is everything. From Day 1 as a union steward at the Chicago-Lawn station on the South Side of Chicago, I expressed to the members that it is imperative that we stick together. Obviously, that is the core principle of our organization: We are a labor *union*. A group of workers united in a common cause, because collectively we are stronger than we are individually.

And there is no doubt that we need to be united right now. The threats against our employer, the United States Postal Service, are real. An attack on us as a labor union is imminent. We see the American Federation of Govern-

ment Employees having to slash half its staff due to the unlawful actions and executive orders of this anti-worker/anti-union administration in Washington. This will compromise the union's ability to effectively represent its members.

As the NALC has consistently and effectively stood in the gap to protect the Postal Service, it would be foolish to think that we and other postal unions will get a pass. Not only because of our advocacy for the Service, but because like other unions, both public and private, we stand in solidarity against the Trump administration's extremist policies of austerity, bigotry and exclusion.

The rhetoric and actions of this administration are a direct threat to our very democracy. This isn't merely a question of philosophical differences; it is a matter of character and a gauge of whether we, as a nation, have a moral compass. There are now strong divisions in our country in part because this administration has allowed the worst elements among us to feel free to express their intolerance and hatred for others under the guise of free speech. It is because of this split in our nation's politics that we are quick to label someone as divisive within our union who disagrees with our opinion.

I recently saw this discussion take place at a state convention, and I give kudos to the national business agent for the way he addressed this question from his members. He explained that everyone who disagrees

with you is not necessarily being divisive. We must be able to embrace our differences of opinions if we are to be a true democratic union. He called on branch presidents to promote debate as opposed to stifling opposition.

This was the same philosophy I promoted as president in Chicago. I often told my executive board that I needed their honest feedback and opinions as we led our local. It would not be productive to anyone, especially our members, if I presided over a table of "bobbleheads." If I put forth an idea that made little sense and they all agreed simply because I said it, then when it is placed before the membership we would all look rather stupid. Just because we are a union doesn't mean we all have the same perspective or thought process. I often told them that some of my best ideas came from other people, so I truly needed their input.

A few years ago, a memo was signed that allowed branch presidents to decide whether newly converted part-time flexible substitutes could get on the overtime desired list in the middle of the quarter. I thought it was a good provision for the membership, especially our new regulars. At our union meeting, I told the members that I would be invoking this provision in every installation because it seemed fair to all. A debate quickly ensued as various members began questioning the "fairness" of allowing them to get on the list because they "turned over," without waiting, until the beginning of the quarter. We had the most spirited debate that I can recall as branch president. Each side was adamant about their belief and even as they disagreed, they were not being disrespectful. As chair, I abstained from the debate. There were some very strong opinions expressed on both sides and at the end of the debate, the members voted not to allow them on until the end of the quarter.

I was humbled, but I wasn't mad. I learned a lot through their debate. I believe everyone respected the opinions of others, even though they were not in agreement. That's because they understood that we are not our own enemy. We are one union with many different perspectives, but the members decide collectively what is in their best interest.

**Debate is good and healthy for our union, and it doesn't have to be divisive.** To simply all "fall in line" is not a democracy, it is an autocracy and that is not in the spirit of being union. We walked out of our meeting that night just as unified as when we walked in. That's because as a labor union, unity is everything!