

Countdown to Detroit



Fredric V. Rolando

This spring, NALC branches are meeting all across the country to elect delegates to the NALC's 71st Biennial Convention in Detroit. It will be our first gathering in Motor City since the 1940s. I am very excited that our great union will meet in a great union town, one that is staging a promising economic and political comeback.

The setting could not be better because the stakes for us could not be higher when it comes to securing our future. It will be the convention before the 2018 midterm elections, which will help determine whether the Postal Service's comeback from the Great Recession can be sustained and strengthened in the

years ahead. It also will be the convention before negotiations for a new labor agreement, which will open about a year from now in 2019.

As branches elect delegates, NALC is battling on multiple fronts on all the major issues affecting letter carriers and their families—issues that are sure to be debated in Detroit.

On the regulatory front, NALC's officers, staff and legal team just put the finishing touches on our formal submission to the Postal Regulatory Commission's proposed rule-making on the regulation of postage rates for market-dominant products—letters, magazines, newspapers and other non-competitive products. The PRC's proposed rule falls far short of what is needed (see last month's *Postal Record*) to place the Postal Service on firm financial ground with pricing flexibility. Our submission exposes the flaws in the PRC's proposal. But more importantly, it also suggests solutions that are fair to the Postal Service's stakeholders—mailers, citizens and employees. A copy of our submission will be posted on the NALC website.

Meanwhile, the Contract Administration Unit and our team of letter carrier staff and officers are busily working to implement the terms of the 2016-2019 National Agreement, preparing the contract for publication, updating the *Joint Contract Administration Manual* and implementing the many provisions and MOUs in the contract. That work will continue even as we begin, 15 months ahead of time, to prepare for the next round of negotiations. My office, our lawyers and some outside consultants already are looking ahead to develop proposals to improve the standard of living of city letter carriers

and to advance the working conditions we face every day. Delegates will play a vital role in these preparations with the debate and adoption of national contract resolutions this summer. Of course, this process involves not only organizing for negotiations, but also for possible interest arbitration. Either way, we will be ready.

On the legislative front, we are expecting many battles affecting the Postal Service and letter carriers in the upcoming debate over the 2019 federal budget, which was released as this issue went to print. Although we are relieved that Congress finally agreed to a bipartisan deal on spending caps for 2018 and 2019 (see story on page 4), in the latest temporary continuing resolution, the devil will be in the details. We will vigilantly defend our jobs, benefits and rights as Congress takes up appropriation bills for 2018 and the proposed budget for 2019—and we may call on carriers who have installed the NALC Member App to help us defend the Postal Service's networks. Indeed, the usual threats to Saturday and door delivery are likely to be raised in the weeks ahead. Given the massive increase in the federal deficit this year and next—driven by last year's massive and grossly irresponsible tax cuts for corporations and the wealthiest among us—we can expect the attacks on federal employees and the Postal Service to intensify in the months ahead.

Even as we fight the short-term budget battles, we also are keeping our eyes on the long-term viability of the Postal Service. We have kept pressure on President Trump to fill the vacancies on the USPS Board of Governors and the PRC, but we also remain focused on postal reform legislation. H.R. 756, the flawed but potentially useful Postal Reform Act of 2017, appears to be stalled in Congress. The fixes to the bill we have sought with respect to Medicare integration and door delivery have not been forthcoming. But even if we could secure them, it seems that the GOP leadership on the House Ways and Means Committee will not support the bill's core reform—Medicare integration. So NALC is working with allies to find alternative solutions, and we will not rest until we relieve the crushing pre-funding burden on the Postal Service. We are convinced that the Postal Service can thrive in the 21st century if we can get the right legislation passed.

This conviction makes the 2018 midterm elections vitally important. There is no substitute for grassroots organizing focused on electing pro-USPS and pro-letter carrier friends to Congress, regardless of political party. As we learned in 2016, elections have consequences. We have our work cut out for us in the months ahead when it comes to getting out the vote.

Delegates to the Detroit convention also will have their work cut out for them. I can't wait to get started.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fredric V. Rolando'. The signature is stylized and fluid.